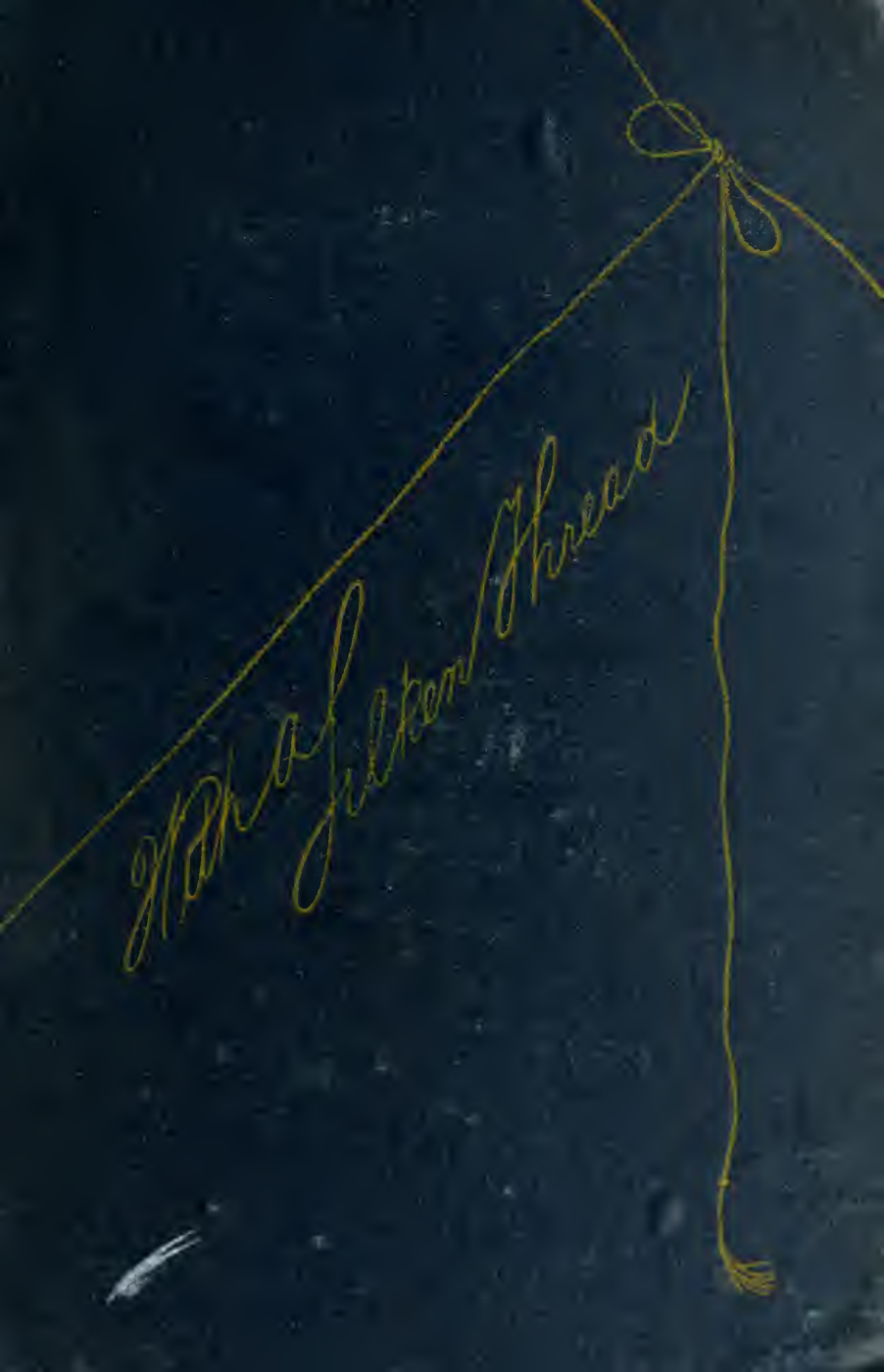

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CHATTO AND WINDUS, PICCADILLY, W.

WITH A SILKEN THREAD

ETC.

WITH A SILKEN THREAD

AND OTHER STORIES

BY E. LYNN LINTON

AUTHOR OF

"PATRICIA KEMBALL," "THE ATONEMENT OF LEAM DUNDAS,"
"THE WORLD WELL LOST," "UNDER WHICH LORD?" ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. III.

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TODHUNTERS' AT LOANIN' HEAD.

TODHUNTERS' AT LOANIN' HEAD.

CHAPTER I.

OUR COUSIN.

THERE were few people more respected in the neighbourhood than Mattie Todhunter, of Loanin' Head. Left a widow while still almost a young woman, with a large family of boys and girls to bring up and but a poor hungry farm of many acres and small produce to do it on, she had proved both her prudence and her skill in that she had fettled up things quite as well as, if not better than, her "master" would have done had he lived—while the management of her children, if rough and something more, had been so far successful in that those who had lived were as fine a set of lads and lasses as could be found in the whole country side. As for those who had died—well, poor things, they were better off as they were!—and if they might have been kept alive by milder measures and greater care, what

would have been the use of it?—a wantle feckless set they would have been, in all probability, and there was no doing at Loanin' Head with such like. Life there was too hard and bleak for hivy children; and so, out of the eleven which Mattie had borne to Isaac—she always regretted not making up the round dozen—but five remained in life at this present time, and six were under the sod in Whelpo churchyard.

And of the five remaining, Mark the eldest son, and Isabella the youngest daughter, were the only ones at home. Grace was practising the millinery in Carlisle; Joseph was 'prentice to a draper in Liverpool; and the youngest of all, "lile Cuddy" as he was called, was learning how to saw and plane and make joists and rabbets at old Greystoke's, the joiner's, at Whelpo. But Mark was his mother's man who would take the farm after her, and live there as his father and forbears had lived before him. And Mark was his mother's favourite; and perhaps the more so because he favoured her family and was far away more of a Postlethwaite than a Todhunter. And Mattie was a true Postlethwaite; and was proud of her blood, as a woman should be. Not that she was aught but proud of her dead husband. Still, the Todhunters had not quite such a steady name nor such a long backlook as the Postlethwaites. It was only fifty years since they had been forced to sell Holme Croft, the best bit of land they had;

and the Postlethwaites had bought it at public roup. So that the Postlethwaite folk stood higher than the Todhunters; and Mattie had never quite lost her sense of family in her wifehood, or concealed it from herself that she might, an' she would, have done better than Isaac.

Accordingly she loved Mark best because he was most of a Postletwait, as she called him; and favoured his grandfather, old Jacob, more than any of the bairns.

But though her husband Isaac had been in a certain sense a failure in that he had been a short-lived man—when scarcely well into his forties dying of consumption, for all his six foot one and three quarters in his stocking feet, his breadth of square-set shoulder, and fist like a shoulder of mutton as they used to say—yet Mattie had never thought of mending her broken life by taking his successor. She put on her deep-bordered widow's cap when her master died; and she had never taken it off since, and never would. It was sixteen years ago now, but she wore her crape and bombazine, as faithfully as if it had been only yesterday; and he would have been a bold man who should have asked her to have doffed them to meet him at the church door.

But there was one thing in Mattie's life, honourable as it was, that she never aired in public. We all have our skeletons; and she had hers. This was a sister,

pretty lile Ruth, or "Postletwait Ruth," as she was generally called, who, years ago had gone off when she was only a slip of a lass of sixteen, with a young collegian who had come down to read, as they do in parties, at the Long Vacation. No one had ever seen her again or had tried to find her. She had gone; and she had written to say that she had gone; and that was all. Had she been foolish with any one at home, keeping company over close and getting into trouble in consequence, why, then her father would have kept her and the bairn without an angry word. He might not have liked it, perhaps; but young folks will be young folks, and maybe he would have gotten them wedded by time; when it would have been all dead and done with as if it had never happened. But to go right clean away from home with a stranger, a gentleman, a mealy-mouthed, false-faced southerner, was more than Jacob Postlethwaite's pride could bear. On the day when the letter came, he called his household together and bade them never to mention lile Ruth again—to think of her as one dead, and to "ask nowt about her from this day for'ard, for they'd never hear nowt whativer they asked." So poor lile Ruth's name was blotted out from the family book and no one ever knew more about her.

It was thought however, that Jacob had had word of her; for a letter certainly did come to him from London

in her handwriting; but whatever it was he never let on to anybody; and by degrees the girl's name and story ceased to interest folk, and she passed out of existence altogether. So much so indeed, that none of Mattie's children knew they had an aunt at all; for our northern folk are rare hands at keeping a secret when they have one, and don't show its skirt corners out of brag and to let on they have something their neighbours would like to know of.

Perhaps though, Mattie who had a good stout heart of her own, and was, as we have seen, proud of her blood, never quite forgot the little sister whom she had loved so well in those old days—how far and yet how near they seemed to be!—and though she had no romantic ideas of finding her out, she had many a hard wrestle in prayer that God would send her back to her old home at Fellneuk once more before she died, and let the mystery about her be cleared up—and her fair fame with it. Ah! one's longings are never satisfied in the way in which one would have them! if at all, only cross-wise as it were, and by implication, not directly.

One day Mattie was busy syling the milk. Mark had been over to Carlisle with beasts to sell. It was market day, and he went over on market days whether he had aught to sell or not. And he brought back a letter. Now, letters were scarce things at 'Todhunters'. Sometimes, to be sure, Joseph would write from Liverpool;

and sometimes Mattie would get a word from a brother of hers over at Arran; but not often; so that when Mark brought out with the tea and coffee and rice that he had got at "Carel," a letter addressed to "Mrs. Todhunter" in a fine pointed female hand, with a deep black border, they both sat looking at it all round, guessing all sorts of things before they thought of opening it.

When Mattie did open it, she thought she should have fallen off her chair at the first words: "Dear Aunt." The letter was signed Laura Matilda Calhoun; and was from lile Ruth's daughter—Mattie's own sister's child—to tell her that her mother was dead, and that she was left alone in the world, an orphan—"Belike then t' father's deed," muttered Mattie sagaciously—and, as it was her mother's last wish that she should go down to Cumberland to see her relations, said Laura Matilda, she was preparing to fulfil her desire; so the next day would find her at Carlisle; and would they send a fly or their carriage to meet her?

"Mother, is t' lass daft?" said Mark, raising his blue eyes to his mother's face uneasily.

"I doubt not, lad," she answered.

"But, mother, thou isn't nae tant!" said the young man again. "Thou hastn't nivver a sister that I'se heerd tell on."

"Yes, yes," sighed Mattie, wiping her eyes.

And then she made a clean breast of it, and told Mark the whole sad story; and how Jacob had sworn them all; and how they never knew what had become of Ruth till now—and now she was dead! And then she wept and rocked herself backwards and forwards in her chair, for sorrow at the past which could never come back again.

"But t' lass wha talks of our carridge?" said Mark interrogatively.

"She maun coom, Mark—my ain sister's child, and nae father nor mither to care for her—she maun coom! though I misdoubt me badly she'll find our ways nobbut rough after her Lunnon fashions. But she maun larn; and if she divn't like it, puir lass, she maun just lump it!"

"Dang it all, but it's a boddersome job!" said Mark, very quietly. And then he went to look after his beasts; and Mattie saw him no more till supper.

The next day it was agreed that Mark should go over to Carlisle and take the spring cart with him for his cousin Laura Calhoun. He was shy, was Mark; a big, square-shouldered, blue-eyed, fair-haired young fellow, rough and awkward as a tyke, but as handsome as a Greek god; by no means of an aristocratic type on the outside of him, with his large red hands innocent of gloves, his feet coarsely shod in clumsy country clogs, his "bettermer" clothes for courtesy; rustic, emphati-

cally rustic; raw, unkempt, unpolished throughout; and yet he was good, brave, pure and handsome. Such as he was however, he drove over to Carlisle in the spring cart, and went straight to the railway station to meet his cousin Laura.

"But hoo's I to ken her?" he thought to himself; and he puzzled over the problem all the way he went. Mattie could give him no sign by which to recognize her niece: and with the thoughtlessness of youth she had not described herself. So he had to trust to chance and good luck; which last, no genuine Cumbrian holds worth a pinch of salt.

At the station there was a crowd, as usual, and many people got out. Some were claimed by their friends and taken into loving custody forthwith; some were evidently at home and walked away by themselves; and thus, after the gradual winnowing had been gone through, it came to pass that one young lady alone was left keeping guard over a dressing-case, a loose railway rug, a bundle of wraps, countless parasols and umbrellas and a travelling-bag. She was a young slight girl dressed in deep mourning; and she stood by the door of a first-class carriage, looking about her with a wistful, desolate air, as if she had come from the clouds and did not know what to do on solid earth.

Mark went bashfully up to where she stood. He glanced at the labels on her packages, and read "Miss

Calhoun, passenger," written in a bold male hand. Yes, it was herself sure enough; a grand young lady, all covered with crape and beads, and with a cockelty little hat set on the top of her nose. A great cascade of light brown hair half way down her back; two big blue eyes the colour of wood violets—Mark's were the colour of turquoise—and a dainty little mouth as red as a damask rose, were the only bits of colour about her. Yes, it was Miss Calhoun, his cousin Laura, sure enough; and, gude sakes, but she was fine!

Mark involuntarily touched his hat.

"Are ye Miss Calhoun?" he asked.

"Oh, thanks, yes," said that young lady. "Have you come from Mrs. Todhunter's for me?"

"Yis," said Mark.

"Will you see to my luggage?" said Laura. "I have three boxes and a carpet-bag and these things here. Take these wraps, please, and this dressing-case. Be careful of the dressing-case and do not let it swing too much."

Mark did as he was bid, and didn't wonder very much. It seemed quite natural that the young lady should treat him as a servant, cousins though they were; and he dreaded the moment when she would have to be told their relationship.

"Maybe ye'd better come yersel and see til yer boxes wid me," he said awkwardly. "I divn't ken them, ye know."

The young lady thought her aunt's man the slowest and stupidest she had seen for many a day; but she went with him all the same, and pointed out her luggage. And then, by way of a covert expression of surprise at his stupidity, she asked a little sharply: "Are you Mrs. Todhunter's servant?"

"Nae; I'se her son," said Mark, blushing to his ears.

"Her son!—what, my cousin!" cried Laura, with a kind of scream.

"Yis," said Mark, and looked as if he wished he could have said No.

Laura had turned even whiter than she was before; and for a moment she felt as if she should faint. But she recovered herself enough to stammer out: "I am very sorry; I did not know."

"Hoo suld ye?" said Mark stolidly. "Ye'd niver seed me afore; and if ye took me for t' man when I'se t' master, what's a body the warse?"

And with that he shouldered one of the boxes, and shouted out to a lounging porter hard by: "Here, Joe, bring yon til t' cart, and look sharp, will te! I doubt, miss," he added, turning to Laura: "t' cart willn't tak them a', an' we mun leave t' rest for Bobby."

"Oh, I cannot leave any!" cried Laura, in great tribulation. "Leave them to Bobby?" she then said. "What do you mean?"

"T' carrier wha cooms Wednesdays, Whelpo way,"—

it was now Friday—said Mark, "Ye see for yersel, miss, we canna tak them a'; and which'll ye be pleased to have?"

He spoke to her as a lady, not as a cousin, and he did not look at her while he spoke; for which Laura was grateful, if—knowing the face he refrained from scanning—surprised. After a great deal of feminine hesitation and anguish of soul concerning her toilette generally, and what she could best do without—but it seemed to her as if she could do but badly without anything—Laura designated the boxes which might be left, and then went outside the station to the carriage that was to convey her to Loanin' Head.

At first she could not believe that she had to get up into a cart with a board across it—a thing such as the laundress used to come in for the clothes; such as butchers drive; such as she had seen filled with low men and women, shouting along the road on race days; but there was no help for it. She was beginning to realize that the whole thing was a gigantic mistake, but she was in the midst of it now and must go on with it to the end.

She did not make any objection then, after her first wonderstruck: "That thing?" but got into the cart with difficulty truly, but with as good a grace as she could command; and they jolted off in silence.

The way seemed interminable to Laura. There were

fifteen good miles between Carlisle and Loanin' Head; but to the weary, frightened, disappointed London girl they seemed to lengthen out to twice twenty. The rough motion of the cart was intolerable to her, tired as she already was with the long railway journey; the heavy hills they had to climb terrified her for the sake of the horse; the steep pitches they forged down with a loose rein and a shambling trot terrified her still more for her own neck; and when they came to a wide, bleak, desolate moor, where the evening wind blew sharp and keen and where not a human habitation was to be seen, she actually wept behind her veil, shivering with cold and dread together.

But Mark was obtuse; and though he shook up an old piece of sacking that was at the bottom of the cart and wanted to wrap it round her shoulders, he did not see her tears, and never dreamed of her state of mind as possible in any human being. The moor was his friend, his home. Backed by fells golden with gorse and purple with heather, alive with birds and beasts, yielding a rich supply of bracken for litter and the like, he had learned to love the wide, bleak plain; and he thought it as bonny, aye and bonnier, than the tastiest spot Keswick way or out by Penrith yonder. So Laura wept unregarded; and Mark broke the silence by short remarks, such as "Yon's Falcon Crag," or "Here's t' heed o' Skiddaw," or "Yon trees is Jackson Place;

Knocker Hoose they call it," and the like. To all of which she gave a lady-like show of attention, too cold however, to satisfy the Cumberland lad, enthusiastic over nothing but his home.

At last they saw a patch of green fields, with a grey low, stone house set close under the fell. Stone fences surrounded and divided the land, but not a tree grew near the place; a few cows and horses were grazing in the fields; some sheep were dotted over the fells. As they drove nearer an array of collies rushed out, barking loudly; and then they jolted on to a bit of rough cobble-paved lane and into a rough cobble-paved enclosure: and Mark said: "This is t' hame, Miss Laura," which he pronounced Lowra, and said for the first time.

An elderly, weather-beaten woman, clad in rusty black and with a large widow's cap, came to the door: behind her peeped a giggling untidy girl of seventeen or thereabouts.

"Ye're welcome, my lass," said Mattie kindly as she took the girl in her arms and lifted her bodily out of the cart, pressing her against her broad bosom so vigorously that she hurt the lithe soft creature with her wooden busk.

"Are you my aunt?" said Laura, opening her eyes very wide.

"Aye, that is I!" was Mattie's answer, with another

hug; and Laura at this gave way in real earnest, and for cold, weariness, disgust and disappointment burst into a wild and stormy hysterical flood of tears which seemed as if they would never end.

"Let her loze!" said Mattie to the rest who stood by and gaped. "Let her loze, puir lass! I'se like to greet mysel'! Puir lile Ruth—bonny lile lass! and she's the very marras of her mother! Eh, my lass, but thou's come to thy hame here—t' Almighty mak' it blessed til thee!"

CHAPTER II.

KEEPING HER HAND IN.

"If mamma had only known!" sobbed Laura to herself, as she hid her face in her strong-smelling goose feather pillow, and gave way to a fresh burst of tears.

But mamma had not known. She had left home when so young, that she had forgotten all about things. Besides, she was too inexperienced then to understand the true state of matters; and the large imagination of youth, with the transforming powers of love and length of time, had made all the past great and beautiful. Then again, Mattie had married but poorly at the best; and Isaac's untimely death, and the large family to bury or bring up which had been left, had kept her ever straitened. And, anxious like a true Cumbrian to lay by for a rainy day as well as to pay her way now, she had cut everything as close as might be; and had not been ashamed of any means whereby she could turn an honest penny or save one. So that she had insensibly drifted more and more into the mere peasant wife instead of to the other side—rising as she maybe might have done into the half-genteel farmer.

As for Ruth, taken while still plastic into such a different line of life altogether, she had dropped by degrees the insignia of her original condition, save a certain racy accent which never leaves the northern tongue. And as Mr. Calhoun had got on pretty well in his profession as an attorney, and had made a sufficient income to enable them to live in style while he was alive—though not to leave his only child more than a very modest sum when he died—Laura had never known anything but a frivolous, superficial, fine-lady kind of life; and had not the faintest idea that her mother's family was different from her father's.

Indeed, she knew nothing of that mother's family at all, save that she was a "Cumberland lass," and that grandpapa Postlethwaite had owned lands and a carriage—the green spring-cart which to Ruth's youthful imagination had been as good a carriage as the best; horses; men-servants—the farm labourers; dogs—the sheep dogs; cows; and, in short, an abundance of everything. This was all that mamma would tell her, or that papa would allow her to know. If Jacob had disowned his daughter and misdoubted her honesty to the last, Mr. Calhoun disowned Jacob and forbade his wife's keeping up any intercourse whatever with the old home. She obeyed him in so far that she never wrote directly to Fellneuk, but she wrote once every two or three years to the clergyman, old Priest Day-

man; and he kept her secret and told her how things went on at her old home. So this was how she knew of Mattie and her marriage; and how it came about that, when Mr. Calhoun died, Laura was told the truth —at least what was meant to be the truth—of her mother's family; and made to consider Fellneuk, and by implication, Loanin' Head, gentlemen's estates with all the luxuries and comforts of her own condition.

Had Ruth not died only a fortnight after her husband and before she had had time to get things straight, she would have brought the girl down to Loanin' Head herself; when she would have seen how far the reality was from the ideal; and how sister Mattie had toiled and moiled herself into a rough and homely "scrat." But she died, poor soul, of bronchitis; and had only time to make her will appointing sister Mattie as the girl's guardian until she was of age, and bid her "go home," as the best she could devise for her. And, as we have seen, Laura obeyed her; and came to Loanin' Head in a spring-cart, driven by cousin Mark in corduroys.

Sobbing now on her home-cleaned goose feathers, wherein it would seem that all the pinions and drumsticks had been left, her dainty London possessions strewed about the shabby, low-pitched room, with its uncleaned casement window; its rickety tent bed hung with scanty dimity; its distorting swing glass

kept straight in its frame by pieces of paper and perched on the top of an old-fashioned bureau—in the dark; its one slip of faded drugget across the black-oak floor—all bare and miserable and wretched—Laura seemed to have touched the very acme of her troubles. The wild moor was before her; beside her rose the rugged fell made beautiful by summer and the moonlight. But she saw nothing of all this. Her only cry was: "If poor mamma had but known!" and then came another: "If Captain Dormer ever finds out!"

So the first evening and a long part of the night passed in tears which made her feel sick and ill, poor child! and did no good to any one. With the morning came a fresh outpour of bewailing and disgust; but after a time she forced herself to reflect that she could do no good by all this weeping—on the contrary, it would only make her eyes red and her face pale and ugly and haggard; that in her deep mourning she could not go out in London even if she were there—and how could she be there at her age alone?—and that she had better set herself to bear as cheerfully as possible what she could not prevent; at least for the present. It was all very dreadful certainly, and she was unfeignedly miserable; but somehow she made up her mind to get what amusement she could out of her queer position, and to turn it to the best account of which it was

capable. It was an experience that was not pleasant, but it was an experience all the same; and she would write to Captain Dormer and make it all look as smooth as she could—never mind whether she kept to truth or not.

That they had been kind to her in their rough way did not touch her in the least; but the personal wisdom of cheerfulness, mainly for the sake of her good looks, did.

It was in a charming frame of mind then, that she came downstairs at about half-past nine; which she thought quite early, but which to Loanin' Head was something out of all bounds and only to be justified on the score of ignorance or illness.

"Well, my bairn, and how's thee the morn?" was Mattie's motherly greeting, as the pretty London girl, in her fashionable London mourning, came in her graceful, creeping way, through the door that shut off the steep stairs from the kitchen, looking as little like the place and its surroundings as a Venus among the field hands. "We'se letten ye lig, ye see. Sleep's a fine thing for t' young, and I'se glad ye've hed seccan a lang spell on't. An' now, what are ye for for yer breckfast? Can ye soop podish? Yer mither was aye a heavy han' at them! But I'se engage ye've not hed them oft in Lunnon? Are ye for tea, maybe?"

"Yes; tea, please, aunt," said Laura, who did not

understand half that Mattie said, but who had made out that one word at all events, and caught at it eagerly.

"Ye'll hev what ye've a mind to, my lass," was Mattie's hospitable answer; and then she bustled about, and called Isabella who had taken refuge in the dairy, and made her bustle about too in her awkward fashion, till they had got Laura's breakfast ready — which they laid on the long oak table by the window and set for her the high chair—the master's chair. And what a chair! Good enough so far as the carving went, thought Laura, who was a critic in carving; but the cushion—or rather the bundle of snippets and ends of carpets and cloth tacked rudely together which went by that name! The poor girl shuddered; and wondered if a Cumberland farm kitchen was like to a London one in certain respects; for if so——! However, she sat down; and even ate a piece of oatcake without visible disgust, as a propitiation to the lares of the establishment; and Mattie, telling her repeatedly to "tak' hauld," looked on approvingly and thought again how much she favoured bonny lile Ruth; and "nay, but she was reet pleased to hev her at Loanin' Heed!" she said at least half a dozen times, wiping her eyes at each repetition.

At noon Mark and t' lads came in for their meat; and this was more than Laura's philosophy could bear.

So long as she had to do only with aunt Mattie and gawky, giggling Isabella, she could manage pretty well; but when it came to mixing up with coarse farm-servants fresh from their work—no, that was beyond her! Under pretence of a headache she left the house, and strolled away on to the moor in front of the kitchen windows.

"I doot, mother!" was all that Mark said, with a long look at the girl's slight figure as it stood in the sunlight and the breeze on the brown moor, in the most becoming attitude imaginable.

And Mattie looked after her too, and answered briskly: "She'll fettle oop in time, lad! Room wasn't built in a day!"

By-and-by aunt Mattie found out what her fine London niece specially liked; and humoured her. And Laura furbished up the mean and meagre parlour; and, with the help of muslin and ribbon and bits of bright damask, a new paper, a new carpet, and a "sight of new-fangled farlies," as Isabella said, made it really quite smart and pretty and fit for the summer retreat of even a London lady used to Bayswater and an occasional opera box. And when she had finished all this she let it be understood that she considered the room as her own, where not even aunt Mattie was to intrude without invitation; but where she did often graciously invite both Mattie and Mark, and even shock-headed

Isabella, who never went unless she was obliged, and when she did go giggled and stammered all the time till she became fairly unintelligible. The rough Cumberland girl had not got used to her cousin, but was "downreet skeared" of her, and scuffled out of her sight whenever she had the chance. Mark too, was never very forward or familiar; though Laura, born flirt as she was, "kept her hand in" by a thousand pretty little enticements, a thousand soft seductive ways and tender flatteries and gentle sweet suggestions, till Mark's honest heart was all aflame and his slow wits bewildered. For what did it all mean? and was he clean daft and mazled? and how could he, a mere Cumberland farmer lad, think such thoughts of a lady like Miss Lowra?

The immediate result of Laura's queenship of the parlour, where she so often invited cousin Mark under pretence of wanting this little job done or of knowing that little bit of natural history, was, that the honest lad, shy-like as he was, shrank from the pleasant danger with the timidity of a girl: and while longing to be for ever at her side, bided less and less at home; till Mattie was like to mourn over the frequent absence of her favourite. To be sure he went all the more to old Greystoke's at Whelpo; where lile Cuddy was 'prenticed to the joinering and where Phœbe—Greystoke Phœbe — made him tea and gridle-cakes, or

pressed on him snaps and gin, or maybe rum and milk instead, as the time of day or kind of weather suggested. And Mattie thought for ever of Phœbe; and knew no one in all the country side whom she would rather Mark would bring home to be her daughter than the rosy-faced, strong-armed, capable young Whelpo lass.

That something was stirring in him was evident, else why did he take to cleaning himself so often as he did? and, gude sakes! but he wore his bettermer clothes pretty nigh every day now! and, my word! but he had grown parlous fond of flowers all of a sudden! Why, one market day he brought from Carlisle in the cart as many as two dozen fine things—far too fine for Loanin' Head; geraniums and roses and queer things with outlandish names, which he planted in a sheltered spot just before the parlour window. He had wrought early and late at that bit of garden; and Mattie often noticed Laura leaning out of the window talking to him; and she was perplexed thereat. Whatever was Mark thinking of? and which lass was he for? He humoured Laura, and he went to see Phœbe; surely the lad was demented to be carrying on with both at once; and he'd have to be taken in hand by-and-by if he didn't learn himself, thought Mattie a little sternly as well as troubled.

Nutting time had come. From Mattie Postlethwaite's

first wedded year, it had been the practice for all the Loanin' Head folk to go over to Fellneuk for a day's nutting in Lady Coppice. While old Jacob had lived, and since his death when young Jacob ruled in his stead, the custom had been kept up; and though Mattie was sorely fashed this year to know what to do about Laura, she would as soon have thought of breaking her baptismal vow as of breaking the old time-honoured custom.

"Wil't come, bairn?" she said to her niece, as they discussed the weather and the chances of a fine day to-morrow—she; Isabella, who giggled as her share in the discussion; and bashful, blushing Mark—the trio having marched with some degree of solemnity into the girl's bower-like room. "Thou's gitten to see Fellneuk and thee uncle Jacob, thou know'st, and mappen it's best dune at once."

Laura did not say nay, but still felt strongly enough that she would rather not see any other uncle or aunt on her mother's side; and that if Fellneuk were a second Loanin' Head she had no desire to redouble her experience.

"Miss Lowra maybe willn't like t' woods," put in Mark, who would have given all the world that she should go, but who would not buy his pleasure by her pain. "They'se rough for them as isn't used."

"Oh, I shan't mind. If aunt Mattie wants me to

go, I am quite willing," said Laura, with the most enchanting complaisance, smiling at Mattie with that bewitching little face of hers which nothing but a heart of stone could resist.

"Ah! ye're a douce bit bairnie!" sighed Mattie lovingly; "and yer cousin yonder 'll loup ye ower t' bogs and slattery spots."

On which Isabella chuckled audibly, and put her fingers in her mouth as she looked at her brother, who blushed.

"You are very kind, and I am sure that Mark will do all he can to help me," said Laura, turning her dark blue eyes with a sudden flash full upon Mark's light blue ones, according to a way she had; and at her look Mark suddenly became quite pale; and, turning face about, left the room abruptly.

"Weel! them's manners, or my name's Jack Robinson!" was Mattie's angry comment as her son walked away, while Laura smiled in sweet forgiveness and Isabella started after her brother.

The next day was fine—one of those delicious days of early autumn or late summer which we have in the north to greater perfection than elsewhere throughout England. The sky was cloudless, save for a few light snowy curls that seemed to have been set against the heavens as an enhancement of the tender blue; the skylarks were singing as they soared by dozens over

the moor; while the plaintive little peewit uttered its melancholy cry, running with drooping wing on the grass. Every one was in happy humour. Even Laura forgot for the moment to speculate on her future, or to weave plans of how she could escape before her age of legal enfranchisement from the custody which was at once so loving and so distasteful. The spring-cart too, did not seem quite so harsh and jolting as when she came over from Carlisle on that miserable evening; and she had a greater sense of security, seated as she was closely pressed between aunt Mattie and Mark—with Isabella on a "copy-stool" on the floor at the back. So that altogether it was really almost a pleasant drive; the London girl feeling, as she often did, as if she were acting a part in a charade and that nothing of all about her was real. As for Mark, he remembered that day to the end of his life. He had not much poetry of nature or imaginative faculty, but what he had was called out to the full; and for ever after that drive in the sweet sunshine by the fellside road from Loanin' Head to Fellneuk, with Laura Calhoun by his side—her pretty eyes looking up into his as she asked him now this, now that—her bonny mouth smiling—her soft voice falling like a shower of silver sound—was the first suggestion of Heaven that he had, and made him feel capable of another life than the mere herding of beasts and shearing of corn at Loanin' Head.

Laura found her uncle Jacob—how she winced at the words!—a tall, grave, silent man, who looked at her steadily for a moment; said only: "And ye're Ruth's bairn?" as he gave her his huge hand and shook hers sideways, but otherwise did not molest her; while his wife, rather abashed at the presence of so fine a lady, beyond setting her a chair out in the very middle of the kitchen floor, offering her first a glass of gin cordial, then some home-made gingerbread snaps, with much pressing hospitality beseeching her not to be "afeerd of them, but to tak hauld and mak hersel' welcome," left her pretty much alone. And as Mattie was occupied with "Jacob's Jane," this same sister-in-law, in comparing certain housekeeping notes, and Isabella and t' lasses were off on a special spree of their own, there was no one left but Mark to take care of his cousin. And presently he, feeling the weight of the honour and the responsibility, went up to where she was sitting in this old stuck-up manner, and asked her if "she would coom out int' coppy, and see what they's like to git?"

"Yes," said Laura, rising with alacrity.

"Keeping her hand in" with handsome cousin Mark—handsome undoubtedly, if also undoubtedly boorish—was better than sitting in the middle of the kitchen floor under the slow but searching gaze of uncle Jacob smoking his long clay pipe in the ingle-neuk, while

aunts Mattie and Jane talked both at once in their native Doric about their pigs and their calves, and how they had "fettled oop t' ane, an' tewed ower t' ither a' that iver they had tewed." So she went out with cousin Mark, and they strolled into Lady Coppice—Leddy-Coppy, he called it—to look at the nut trees and get the start of the rest in the day's work. And Laura thought she had never seen such a beautiful picture—of its kind—as cousin Mark made when he swung down the tall strong branches for her to strip, his fair face flushed, his bright brown sunny hair shining as if of gold, and his blue eyes dark and tender with the new soul that had come into them through her.

And looking at him, as a painter would have done, the devil entered into the soul of the woman and tempted her.

"Cousin Mark," she said suddenly, with a half-plaintive smile; "I am afraid I am a great nuisance to you at Loanin' Head."

"You, Miss Lowra!" said Mark, who had not failed to notice the "cousin" and the tenderness of voice and face. "Howiver in all t' world has that fancy gitten into your head?"

"Why, yourself, cousin Mark."

"I, Miss Lowra! What hev I dune to mak ye feel owt but welcome—better nor welcome, at Loanin' Head?"

"Because you stay away so much. I hear aunt Mattie notice it and complain of it. And I think you stay away because I am there."

"Niver siccan a thing! niver! niver!" said Mark, with energy. "A' I want is that ye suld feel yersel at hame like and comfortable at t' place; and that t' women folk sarra ye as they ought."

"Oh yes, nothing can be kinder!" said Laura; "it is only about you that I am troubled."

"Nay, what! niver fash yersel aboot me, Miss Lowra! I'se dne weel enough, I'll engage," Mark answered huskily.

"You are so good!" said Laura, laying her small white ungloved hand on his.

What would not Mark have given to have clasped it, and kept it as his own! But it was as if a mortal should have asked a goddess to be his; and he let the pretty fingers lie there passively, with a heart that throbbed almost as if it would burst.

"What a fool he is!" thought Laura, smiling up into his face more sweetly than ever, and letting her hand slide caressingly over his.

Then they went on till they came to one of Mattie's "slattery spots," where a mountain torrent, crossing the wood path, had broadened out into a muddy pool too wide for even Laura's light feet to jump across. Mark looked unutterable distress. He tried backwards

and forwards, and this side and that side, like a faithful hound trying for a scent, but he was "fairlie bet" at the last, and had to own that he saw no way by which Miss Lowra could cross; and should they turn back?

"Oh no! don't let us turn back!" said Laura. Then holding out her arms, a little raised, she said half laughing: "Carry me across, cousin Mark! I am not heavy, and you are such a nice strong fellow."

Giddy, half-blinded, but with a feeling of sudden glory that made him something different from the Mark of ordinary days, the young man lifted her in his arms and carried her across the bog. And as he went, Laura, looking down into his face above which she was raised, bent her own till her lips touched his forehead and her hair brushed his cheeks. He did not know whether it was an accident or by design; he would never have known had she not blushed in her turn—she had just so much grace—and said, in a light voice: "That was for toll, cousin Mark!"

CHAPTER III.

ANDROMEDA.

On the day when Laura Calhoun paid toll in Lady Coppice, Captain Dormer received his orders to take his men down to Carlisle. Now Captain Dormer had been a difficulty with Laura. There had been sundry love passages between them before she left London, and quite a tender leave-taking at the station—but no offer. He had danced attendance on her for about six months altogether during her father's lifetime and when they lived in style; he had befriended both her mother and herself when the father died; and he had done what he could for her when she was left quite alone. And, as the last that he *could* do, he had written her directions, marshalled her luggage, seen to her straps and wraps and carriage comforts, and accompanied her to the station. But still he had not spoken; and since her sojourn at Loanin' Head Laura had been ashamed to write to him, as she had promised, fearful lest he should find out the true status of her mother's family and some day chance to see aunt Mattie and cousin Mark.

And he for his own part wanted to know exactly

what was left her by her father, before he committed himself. Report alternated between ten and fifty thousand pounds; but he did not care to trust to anything so vague as report; and as it was too early after the death of her parents to take any decided steps in the matter, he was forced to let her go without the final word, though with a certain elastic understanding between them that might mean everything or nothing as expediency determined. When therefore he received his marching orders for Carlisle, among his first thoughts came the remembrance of Laura Calhoun; among his second, that—as he should be now in her neighbourhood—he would find her out, and if she had what he hoped and what his wife must have to enable him to marry at all, why, then he would propose:—when he supposed the thing would be done. He never contemplated the possibility of a refusal among other contingencies. But why had she not written all this time? This was what puzzled him. However, he would soon learn all about her now, and make up his mind. She was a pretty little thing, and he supposed no worse than other girls. And if he had to marry, as he must some time, she would do as well as any one else, provided she had the requisite amount to make it worth his while.

Meantime, while he calculated so coolly, poor honest Mark's whole soul had gone out to the fascinating little

gipsy who was not worth the love of an honest man of any degree. Not that Mark dared to speak out or make his love openly manifest. All that he did was to "clean" himself more vigorously than ever; to spend more time and more money over "Miss Lowra's gardin," before her parlour windows; to leave off going to old Greystoke's; and to make excuses for incessant conference with the girl, who, idle and heartless, found it more amusing to watch her rustic cousin's growing passion, than to sit in her own room doing nothing more exciting than embroidering or novel-reading.

The one who did not like the turn which things were taking was aunt Mattie, who no wise favoured Laura for her son's choice. She was too fine for a Cumberland farmer's wife and too feckless all ways. She was well enough to look at and to make of; but as Mark's wife—"gude sakes! he had better put his hand intil t' fire right out; or cry Loanin' Head at public roup; for that's what it wad coom til! Nay! Greystoke Phœbe as soon as he wad! But Lowra!—Lord luv ye, niver siccan a thing! And Mark wad surely niver be sae daft and soft as think twice on her!"

Nevertheless, Mattie was disturbed in her secret heart and feigned a security that she did not feel.

"I'll ride over and reconnoitre," said Captain Dormer half aloud. He had been about a week at Carlisle; and by dint of inquiries and the Ordnance maps, had made

out Loanin' Head at last; but it had been difficult; which gave him the impression that somehow Laura's grand Cumberland relations, of whom she said her mother had spoken, were not quite so grand as had been made out.

At the very moment when he was riding over Carlisle Bridge, Laura, leaning out of her small casemented window, was saying to Mark, working in the garden: "I don't know what I should do without you, cousin Mark! you are so good and kind! and you do so much for me!"

Now, Mark would not have thought much of it if Phœbe Greystoke had said substantially the same thing in her vernacular; but when Miss Laura took to paying compliments, he never knew how to look. It was not that she said anything very remarkable. To call him kind, to acknowledge that he tried to please her, though it made poor Mark's foolish heart throb, still was not a compliment of so much warmth as would appear to warrant all this excitement. But her manner! It was this which "dinged him ower," as he said to himself. Still he was too stolid and too real to trust even to such a manner as hers—to the soft upraising of her deep blue eyes with her head bent shyly as if in sweet and tender modesty—to the loving smile that came and flitted like a sunny ray about her face—to the surpassing music of her voice—to all the fascina-

tion, the allurement, the charm which a pretty, crafty woman can throw into her accent, so as to give a meaning to her words beyond that which the dictionary ever assigns. And then he held Miss Lowra in such high esteem, he would not have dared to translate for his own advantage mere signs such as these! He only blushed and looked magnificently handsome in the sunlight—so handsome that Laura felt really quite to love him in a way, for all that he was a mere rough Cumberland farmer—as he answered with unwonted tenderness of voice: "I'se glad ye're suited, Miss Lowra. If I knawed as hoo I culd suit ye better, I wad. There's nowt in t' warld I wadn't du for ye, Miss Lowra; an' ye bad me I'd lig in t' mid ov t' road yonder an' ye might walk ower me, ye might, an' it wad please ye!"

"You dear good Mark!" said Laura affectionately; but she very nearly laughed outright. "But why do you always call me Miss, cousin Mark? Are we not cousins?—and something more?" she added after a pause.

Now this was more than flesh and blood could stand. Respect and modesty were all very well, but when a girl makes such a "long arm" to a young man, what can he do but take advantage of the offer? Mark laid down his spade and came to the window.

"What mair?" he asked in tones rich and mellow

with emotion, for all the country accent :—"How like Walker's picture at the Academy last year!" thought Laura, looking coquettishly into his straight, frank, honest face.—"What more?" she answered, lightly drawing her finger tips over his curling hair. "Why, friends, you stupid old cousin Mark! what more should we be?"

"Aye, indeed! what mair suld we be, Miss Lowra!—what mair could we be!" echoed Mark, sighing.

"Now," said Laura playfully; "what are you sighing for, you foolish fellow?"

"Maybe because ye're owre good or owre bonny, Miss Lowra," was Mark's answer, made very sadly.

This time the two small white hands took the young man's face between them. "Oh, you silly old Mark!" she said, and bent her face near her cousin's.

She was leaning out of the window; her slender waist was just above the sill and her arms were raised so that Mark could see the jimp, trimly-belted little figure; and Mark liked jimp trim waists. Suddenly—he never knew how it was done, where he got the courage from, how he ever came to be so audacious—his strong arms clasped themselves round the slight figure leaning out as if to offer itself, and Laura found herself imprisoned against his breast, while, low and husky with love and its great fear he whispered to her tenderly: "Hinny, but I love ye! a, but I love ye!—

Oh, Lowra! Miss Lowra! do ye love me, nay, but haulf o' what I love ye?"

"Of course I love you, cousin Mark?" said Laura in deadly terror. She had had no idea of lighting the tow to this extent. She had played with fire truly, but she had had no wish to set herself ablaze thereby.

"Nay, nay, but div ye loe me mair nor that?" said Mark, who now that the ice was broken went rapidly down the stream, as is the manner of the shy and cautious when once they have let themselves go. "Will ye marry me, Miss Lowra? A, but ye'll niver repent it, my darling! I'se love ye weel, an' ye'll niver hev cause to wish ye hedn't!"

"Marry you! oh, cousin Mark!" said Laura in genuine dismay.

The strong arms dropped as if they had been paralyzed.

"Ye'll carry on as ye hev been, and not wed?" he said, with as much sorrow as amazement. "Nay, I'se not think it o' ye, Miss Lowra!" And he took her again to his breast, as if he had done her a wrong and would atone for it. "Ye'se be my wife, Miss Lowra?"

"Oh, Mark! don't ask me!" said Laura; and she began to cry. And Mark, not knowing what better to do, kissed her for sympathy;—and she let him kiss her without rebuke.

"Now then, I know that ye love me!" said honest

Mark triumphantly; "an' nowt in heaven or airth sall part us. Ye're mine; an' I'se defy t' best man amang them a' to part us!"

"Noo then, ye twa bairns, what's to do wid ye!" called out Mattie's voice a little harshly, as her iron-shod clogs came clattering round the corner. Truth to say, she had been listening to and fuming at the loss of time involved in the click of Mark's spade; and when the click stopped, she fumed still more, fearing that time was not only being wasted over daftnesses that maybe did no worse harm than waste it, but that likely ill employed it;—and that was worse. Mattie had eyes, and she used them pretty sharply.

Mark, blushing like a peony, heated and confused, but Laura quite pale and calm and composed, though her eyes were a little red, met Mattie's keen gaze as she clattered into the small cobble-paved enclosure which Mark was beautifying—spending his money on flowers and his time in tending them, that Laura might lean out of the window and bewitch him to his ruin.

"Hey, Mark lad! what's to do that ye're daundering here in t' varra mid ov t' day, an thee woork ligging boddom upmost for thee! Lauvin days! did a body iver see siccan a gowk! Maundering here an' daundering there, an' a' to set a lile lock posies nacbody wants but miss yonder! I'se cry shame on ye, Mark, an' ye weren't yersel!"

"Shame theesel, mother, to coom routing an' grouting at what's nae call of yours at a'," said Mark, angrily.

It was the first time he had ever given his mother a back word; but, with Miss Laura's fair face looking on, and the touch of her lips still on his and what he took to be her promise in his ear, it hurt him to be rated like a hind and schooled like a lad.

Mattie stopped dead in her wrath. She looked from one to the other, anxiously questioning them by her eyes.

"Hey, what is't gitten as far as this?" she said slowly. "Then, Mark and Lowra too, it's time for *me* to speak!"

"Hond thee noise, mother an' divn't mak theesel a fule doonright," was Mark's rough rejoinder, as he shouldered his spade and stalked away, manlike, with the air of one who is master of the field but in reality beating a retreat. He could face most things, could the stalwart Cumberland lad; but his mother's tongue, when set loose, was more than he could brave!

"Here, my lass," said Mattie, coming close up to the window and taking Laura's hands in hers; "tell us what's up twixt ye an' Mark."

"What do you mean, auntie dear?" asked Laura innocently, stroking the grey hair that came just below the huge flapping border of her widow's cap.

"Ye divn't git my meaning?" Mattie said, interrogatively. She had knitted her heavy brows till they nearly blotted out her eyes altogether, but Laura could see them flame behind the forest of hairs; and somehow she felt like a prisoner brought to the question, and under the power of those keen and angry eyes.

"Not the least in the world, dear," she answered lightly; but a slight colour stole into her face and she found it difficult to keep her own eyes straight and her voice quite steady. She was awfully frightened, it must be confessed!

"Ye divn't see that our Mark is clean daft and bemaffled about ye?" speared Mattie.

"Auntie!" coquettishly.

"An' ye divn't mean to be owt to him, yersel?"

"*I* anything to him!" She hesitated, not knowing what to say. Then she laughed lightly, and patting her aunt's face said merrily: "Why, what can I be to him but his cousin, auntie? What a dear funny old thing you are!"

"Nay, nay, my lass, ye divn't slither sae far!" said Mattie sternly. "Ye might be his wife as weel as his cousin, Lowra. Not but that it 'ud be t' warst day for Mark as ever he seed, but there's nae law of man or God agin it. An' *ye* might du warse, if Mark 'ud scarce mannish a bigger bit o' daftness."

"Poor Mark! I'd make but a useless kind of wife for him," said Laura lightly.

"Yes, ye wad; mair nor useless," was Mattie's grim reply. "But I'd larn ye your duties, lass, an' in time ye'd maybe be worth summot. Say it oot, an' let's a done wi' a' this hiding away o' neuks an' corners, an' whispering an' havering—say it out, Lowra, as ye'd tell it to yer ain dead mither—dost thou really loov oor Mark, an' wad ye tak t' loff of him if ye hed it?"

She spoke with dignity, with solemnity, and Laura was sobered—brought face to face with human truth and emotion, thrust in a cleft stick which she herself had spent her time in cleaving, and feeling the bonds into which she had thrust her limbs, for a joke, tightening round her.

"I don't know what you mean, auntie," she said again, beginning to whimper.

"Then I'se tell ye, lass. I mean this—that ye're setting yer cap at oor Mark, an' that ye're doing for him!"

"Doing for him, what nonsense!" cried Laura, through her tears. "He doesn't care for me, aunt."

"Yes, but he does, Laura, worse luck for him; an' ye ken it weel enough, an' I ken that ye knaws it. An' I'se tell thee this, lass, own niece as ye are, that if I see thee play Mark yonder fause, I'se shutten thee oot o' t' hoose, an' ye'll niver darken t' door flagging again! Mind noo, an' I tell ye! an' I niver gae back from my word!"

She took the girl's wrist and griped it hard, till Laura screamed with pain.

"Auntie, you hurt me!" she cried.

"An' I will hurt ye mair if ye play my lad fause!" said Mattie.

"Are ye doited, mither?" cried Mark, suddenly dashing into the enclosure. "Leave things as belangs to me to me mysel, an' divn't ye mell on what's not thine. Hands off, mither—eh!—must I loze them?" He tore the strong grip passionately asunder. "Niver ye mind what naebody says," he said to the girl, laying his hand in a protecting reverential way on her shoulder. "Ye'se gotten me, Miss Lowra, an' whiles ye've gotten me not t' haill woorld sall touch ye!"

"Ye'll rue, lad! ye'll rue!" said Mattie, her voice flung up to a scream. "She'll cheat thee as sure as t' mither on her cheated her father! Thou's leaving t' true, lad, for t' fause; and God ha' mercy on thee!"

Just then Isabella's shrill voice was heard, "Mark! mither! come! Hornie's fit to dee!"

Love could wait, and Laura with love; but Hornie, the best beast in the byre, must be looked to at once. Whereupon the young farmer and his mother went off to the cow house and Laura was left to ponder.

And all this time Captain Dormer was putting his horse towards Loanin' Head; and by now had come to the edge of the moor.

CHAPTER IV.

PERSEUS.

Terrified lest aunt Mattie should return and push her for a second time into a corner—terrified even of poor Mark, for all his reverent love and unselfish devotion—Laura profited by the diversion of Hornie's being like to die, and putting on her hat went out to the moor to try and think out her position and see how she could best escape from the pitfall which she had dug for herself. She felt like one of the pictures of Andromeda which she had seen a little while before leaving London: a beautiful maiden bound to a rock with an awful sea-monster approaching to devour. Only that the monster was a handsome, noble-hearted landsman, whose crime was in wearing fustian and speaking in a provincial dialect—whose folly was in letting himself be seduced by fascinating manners and a pretty little face. So she wandered, full of thought and fear, across the long brown moor, taking instinctively the direction of the city—where, if she could only be!—she thought, almost crying. If only she could escape from this horrible life at Loanin' Head, where she could not even talk a

little pleasantly to a boor like Mark, but she must be taken to task and asked what she meant, and made to feel that she was very wrong and very wicked if she did not marry him! Marry him indeed! she would die first! And yet how handsome he was—and how good! What a life! what people! what a dreadful position altogether! And to be in their hands as she was, legally under their control without money or power or anything else; and all to go on for another two years —two interminable years—before she should be of age and her own mistress! She knew that she should die under it; she was sure of that; and then they would be sorry they had treated her so badly. And, overcome by self-pity, the girl sat down on a stone by the side of the rough cart-way and burst into an hysterical flood of tears. As Mattie used to say of her, "she was a rare hand at greetin';" and had an ample supply of tears for all occasions.

Presently the wind brought her the sound of a horse's hoofs, cantering briskly along the hard road. There was something in the sound that spoke of hope —and a gentleman. The lumbering thud of the ordinary cart-horse she knew too well; for how many times had she not listened to those deceptive hoofs, and thought that perhaps a deliverer in the person of a lover—or, more concretely, Captain Dormer—was coming over the wild waste to free her from her bonds

and carry her off into security and the gay world? Yes, Laura confessed it honestly to herself she longed to see a "gentleman" again; and she would not have made many objections had one of the right pattern asked her then and there to elope with him and leave Mark and Loanin' Head, and the pit which she had digged for herself, and the bonds into which she had thrust her own limbs, and the tow to which she had set fire, all in the background once and for ever. She was sure that this was not to be one of the disappointments which she had learnt so sorrowfully by heart! Crisp, light, well trained, the sound came to her like the most harmonious music; and hastily drying her eyes she posed herself in a sweet, modest, graceful attitude, thinking of herself as Faust's Gretchen and hoping that she might be looking the character to perfection, as she plucked the petals from a daisy one by one, and made believe to pluck them for a purpose and to say "he loves me; he loves me not"—according to orthodox tradition. She said nothing of the kind; but looks go a long way.

So intent was she on her pretty little pastime, she did not notice that a sleek brown horse, with a smart, dapper rider on its back, was coming nearer and nearer—no, not until the creature was close upon her; and then she started up with a shy and startled glance, and threw herself into the attitude of a faun at gaze, before flying like the wind from the face of danger.

"Captain Dormer!"—Miss Calhoun!"—they both cried together; and the Captain, reining up so suddenly that his horse was nearly thrown backward, sprang from the saddle, holding her by both hands as fervently as if she had been his acknowledged lover.

"Oh, Captain Dormer, is it really you? Oh, how glad I am!" she said, almost clinging to his hand. And then she began to cry again.

"Miss Calhoun! Laura!" cried the Captain, really distressed at the sight of her distress. He was a good-natured little man, if shallow, and he hated tears. "Now sit down, and tell me all about it," he then said, very kindly. "Where are you living? I mean, where is this place of yours, Loanin' Head? And what kind of people are your relations, and how do they treat you?"

"Oh, they are dreadful!" sobbed Laura.

"Dreadful? How? Are they cross to you?"

"Yes, very," she said piteously. "They keep me quite a prisoner and I am miserable. You must not come near the place, Captain Dormer."

"Why not?" he laughed. "Would they kill me?"

"I don't know what they would not do to you—and me," she added; thinking that perhaps the prospect of a little danger might not deter him, if he was very much in love with her—but if it got *her* into a scrape, would not his gallantry find that a sufficient barrier?

Whatever the means, she must keep him away from Loanin' Head; and Laura Calhoun was by no means a young lady scrupulous about means.

"Poor little thing!" he said with a great deal of misplaced compassion. "We must get you out of this, anyhow. But what a set of brutes! I cannot understand any one treating *you* ill."

"Oh! you should have heard my aunt scold me today!" said Laura. "She has a great horrid son that she wants me to marry. He has been making love to me ever since I went there; and of course it would be a very nice thing for them if I would marry him, you know, because then they would get all my money."

"What wretches!" ejaculated the gallant Captain. "I hope though you have too much sense and spirit to be made to do that, Laura?"—the "Laura" came in very naturally this time. "I have always been afraid that your money would be a bait to mercenary hounds like that, who could not appreciate your dear little self but who would want your fortune for their own purposes."

"Yes," said Laura with the sweetest, simplest manner in the world; "and I shall have a very good income indeed when I am of age."

"I am exceedingly glad to hear it," was the reply, made with fervour.

"About a thousand a year, I believe," she said.

If she had said that a few pounds under this sum was her sole capital, she would have about hit the mark.

"What a good thing for you!" said Captain Dormer; and on the strength of its being a congratulatory proceeding he again took her hand and pressed it; and Laura thought how nice it was to have her hand taken by one in a well-fitting, clean glove—not like cousin Mark's, hard and rough and with signs of toil never wholly effaced. How delightful too, to hear an educated voice with a well-bred accent, and to be in the company of a gentleman!

She never knew that she loved Captain Dormer so much as she loved him to-day. And oh! if he would only run away with her and marry her! If he would just take her behind him on his horse now and ride with her into Carlisle, she would not mind what the people thought or how they stared. To think that she must go back to that horrid place and cousin Mark, after having been with *him!* What could she do to make him see it as his duty to take her away?

All these thoughts passed through her mind as she sat on the stone for a good hour longer, and gave him a fancy sketch of her position—really quite a pathetic sketch, and very well done from an artistic point of view. Looked at morally, it would have perhaps been more commendable if it had been true. Such as it was, however—with the thousand a year as a makeweight—

it inspired Captain Dormer with the most ardent desire to be the Perseus to her Andromeda, and to rescue her and her fortune from the devouring jaws of cousin Mark and the machinations of that artful, scheming and dreadful old aunt Mattie. Rashly perhaps, considering that he had only her word for it, yet carried out of himself by the sight of her beauty—she was looking so lovely!—and by the knowledge of her distress, determined to take her by the chance of losing her, Captain Dormer went much further than he had the slightest intention of doing when he set out from Carlisle in the morning; and before Laura had turned her light steps homewards had made and received the most ardent confession and protestations of love—of an attachment dating as far back, on both sides, as first acquaintance—of thoughts that had never wandered in either—of love that would never grow old or cold or cross or stupid—of constancy that would last through life—of sublimated passion at high pressure for ever. And so they parted—engaged; but at Laura's vehement almost agonized entreaty, engaged in secret to be married in secret—a runaway match, next week; before those dreadful relations of hers should even suspect that she had a lover to see that she was not ill-treated and forced into a union so hateful, so impossible as this with cousin Mark; which old aunt Mattie was urging for her own part, and cousin Mark insisting on with almost brutal fervour for his.

"For my cousin Mark is the most dreadful creature you can imagine, Captain Dormer; and as for aunt Mattie, she is too awful! Such a temper! So miserably mean and stingy! She is very rich indeed—very; and she looks like an old charwoman; I declare she does! Oh, if I could but get away from them!"

"So you shall, dear. You little trembling doubter! Trust yourself to me and I will defend you with my life!"

"You dear!" said Laura, nestling against his arm and putting up her face.

But it was now time for her to go back to the house—she would not call it home, she said, with a scornful little toss of her head. So they parted with a promise to meet again this day next week, when they would part no more; for then the law would give him the right to protect her and put it out of the power of Mark the monster to devour her and her thousand per annum.

And while she had been making love to Captain Dormer on the moor, Mark and his mother, having tended Hornie in her bad time and brought her through, had their first loud, serious quarrel, all about cousin Lowra; wherein Mark had so far forgotten himself that, exasperated by something more than usually severe which Mattie said, he raised his hand; but bethought himself just in time and did not strike her.

Poor Mattie! she gave in at once and for ever when she saw that uplifted hand. Her heart was broken, she said—let it break! Her favourite, her darling, had all but struck her for her very love for him and because she could see that the young jade was playing him false and that naught but sorrow would come of it! Let it go! She washed her hands of it altogether; she had done her duty and now he must manage for himself. So, broken, bowed, dispirited, poor Mattie went sadly forward to her work; and Mark, feeling as he never felt before, as if possessed by a devil yet haunted by an angel, strode out of the house and away to the moor, where he had an instinct that Miss Lowra had gone. And where he met her, not an instant too late for her safety; for Captain Dormer had not long left her and she had only just come to that part of the road which turned back upon itself as it were, while the broad expanse of moor was lost behind a furze-covered mound.

But when Laura saw her monster striding towards her in his working dress, strong, rustic, beautiful and uncouth, her heart died within her; and she thought if the earth would but open and swallow her up how grateful for the shelter she would be! As it was, she put on a sweet smiling face and made believe to look glad; with the blind instinct only that she must keep them all in good humour at Loanin' Head, and not

refuse the most preposterous thing that might be asked of her to do—till this day week when Jock of Hazeldean was to be enacted for their benefit.

"I'se glad I'se met ye!" said Mark anxiously. "Divn't ye care what mither says til ye, my dear. She's as gude a woman as iver stepped in shoe leather, is mither, but she divn't ken a' things, and she carries on a' times as she suldn't. But divn't ye mind; ye's do as ye will, an' ye'll do reet."

"You spoil me, cousin Mark," said Laura.

"Nay, nay! But ye do loov me, Miss Lowra?" he cried suddenly. "I could bide a' things o' this warld an' t' neest, if ye can say wid yer haill heart, 'Mark lad, I loov thee!'"

"Mark lad, I love you!" said Laura laughing. "Will that satisfy you, you foolish boy?"

"An' ye'll be my wife?—ye'll be my ain lile wife?" Mark continued.

"You had better not ask me that, Mark. I should make but a bad wife for you, as auntie knows," said Laura, with a horrible fear lest Captain Dormer should be listening.

Big tears of love, of gratitude, of overwrought feeling, stood in Mark's eyes. "It's me as isn't fit for ye, Miss Lowra!" he said in his simple, honest way, poor fellow! "But if loov, an'—nay, worship—'ll mak up for a' else that's wantin', ye'll hev that, my darling!—

mair nor iver woman hed. Eh, but ye've made me a glad man to-day! It's maist as if I was some one else nor mysel. I feel as if I couldna dee, nor let owt hurt me. Nay, Lowra! divn't turn thee face away! Thou'se nae call to be shamed, my lass—my bonny leddy lass! Thou'se said thou loves me, an' that thou'lt marry me, an' why shouldn't thee look at me, my darling? Eh! but gie me ane sweet kiss—ane, of thine ain free will, as thou gav'st me in Leddy Coppy sae lang ago!"

"You are too good for me, Mark!" said Laura with a sudden spasm of conscience. But she kissed his yearning face nevertheless, and let him hold her in his arms as his engaged wife, with Jock of Hazeldean looming in the near future, only one short week distant!

Thus they went to the house; Mark holding the small white dainty hand in his—how that roughened tan of his contrasted with her white and dainty flesh! —and, so walking, they came to Mattie feeding her geese by the back door; and Mark, as it were giving her to his mother, said huskily: "Tak her, mither, she's yer ain noo, and bless her an' me!"

"The Lord bless ye, my bairns!" was the old woman's solemn reply, as she wiped the tears from her face. "An', Mark lad, let a' that's gone afore to-day be forgot as if 't had niver been."

"I'se sorry, mither," said Mark; "but I knowed an' ye didn't."

"Amen!" said Mattie. "An' noo, lass, ye'se my ain, an' I'se tak ye for my daughter with a reet gude heart; an' may ye baith be happy, an' niver rue this day's wark! Truth an' love mak the warld a bonny place; an' sae long as ye hev baith o' these ye hev a blessing in yersels. Ye mind me, Lowra! ye'll find afore ye dee that yer aunt has said truth in this, if she's leed a' her life beside."

"What a funny thing!" thought Laura. "Engaged to two men at once and both so much in love with me! What a row there will be here when they find I have gone!"

But she said nothing of all this. She only kissed her aunt tenderly and included Isabella as well, and smiled coyly at Mark as she did so; while he was just clean daft over her, as Isabella said to Phœbe Greystoke, —carrying sorrow there, at all events, if only joy reigned at Loanin' Head.

CHAPTER V.

THE CUP AND THE LIP.

If Phœbe Greystoke was miserable and spent her days in gloomy industry and her nights in unavailing tears—if Laura was more than frightened by her quite unnecessary duplicity, feeling as if she had been actuated all this while by a demon, who had led her on from folly to sin, till now she was bewildered at her own iniquity—if aunt Mattie was "dubersome," as she called it, about the whole affair, and by no means in her heart pleased for Mark nor satisfied at his choice, though she made the best of everything to others—if Isabella was more skittish than ever and sure she should niver get used to Miss Lowra as Mark's wife; and, laavin days, whativer made Mark siccan a fuil ower her!—Mark himself was in a state only to be described as "in heaven." For all his life after he remembered that happy time as something almost too delicious for his poor humanity to bear.

He had a fund of natural poetry in him, poor lad, but it had never yet been stirred; and now when the crust was broken and the secret treasures of his nature

set free, he found his new experience too intense for perfect happiness. The sense of unworthiness which it roused up in him was a burden on his soul, already weighted with so much love, so much reverence, so much dumb, unspoken poetry. He could have cried like a great girl when he thought of his own shortcomings and of her unapproachable loveliness, her sweetness, her condescension. How he loved her! He spoke broad Cumberland, he wore fustian and he did rough farm work with his own hands, and yet the love that he gave her might have satisfied even as great a craving for admiration as hers—and it ought to have troubled her conscience; but that she had none to touch. She had the capacity for fear, but not for conscience.

In externals she played her sorry part to perfection. Nothing could be more fascinating, nothing more daintily seductive, than her whole conduct. It was a comedy in which she had had a *rôle* assigned her; and she acted it to the life. She had no excuse for it all. She had simply tried her arts on cousin Mark in the beginning as an experiment, and had struck fire where she had least expected. But she had had no end to gain in doing all the mischief that she had done; yet even now, when she saw the true state of matters, her shallower nature did not take in the sadder part of Mark's intensity but assumed his "*affaire* to be one

which he would get over as other men get over theirs," when the inevitable end had to come. Meanwhile, she counted the days and hours when her Perseus was to come and deliver her from the perils in which of her own wilful sin and folly she had involved herself.

It came at last; and it was done. In the quietest and cleverest manner in the world, Laura gave the family the slip and cheated them all round impartially; taking in both Mark and Captain Dormer—the one for vanity and the other for selfishness. It was in the early morning that she went away. They were all busy in the fields or milking in the byre; and no one of the family saw her steal out through the empty kitchen and across the paved enclosure and down the narrow lane; only an old lame silly man, whom they kept for charity and who was parcel blind and parcel deaf, wholly doited and practically dumb, saw t' young leddy go down the road. But he never let on, whatever he saw. It was no business of his; and it did not strike him as extraordinary or a thing he ought to tell. So Laura went down the lane and on to the moor; and when she had turned the corner of the road which hid Loanin' Head from view, there she found Captain Dormer waiting for her with a groom, a saddle-horse, a riding-skirt and veil; which last evidences of thought and attention touched her more than all the rest.

Scarcely a word was spoken between the two, as Laura was helped into her saddle and started off and away like an arrow loosened from its string. And before the canonical hours were over she was Captain Dormer's wife and safe. Safer, so far as that went, than was he in the possession of a thousand a year which he fondly believed he had gained as well as a pretty face, a slight figure, questionable breeding, no heart to speak of, an odd family connexion, and an amount of duplicity, which, when it came to be revealed, startled even him, man of the world as he was, among whose articles of belief were profound contempt for women in general and the frankest distrust in their virtues.

And before the canonical hours were over she had been missed at Loanin' Head; and sought for.

Sought for, far and wide, before they found a small daintily-written note slipped beneath her toilet pincushion, as if she had wanted to delay the moment of discovery to the latest possible. It was Isabella who found the note. Peering about with the curiosity of a girl, she had turned up the pincushion to see how Miss Lowra had fastened on the lace and fringe; and finding the note, she carried it downstairs to her mother. Now, Loanin' Head did not boast of much scholarship; and among them all Mark was the best. Besides, Laura had been teaching him of late; and to him therefore, the note was given.

The strong young man shook like a reed in the wind as he took it into his large hands, and read to himself—what he had no voice to read aloud—the cruel words which dashed his cup of happiness to the ground and broke it into fragments that could never be put together again.

"Dear Aunt," it said, "you will all be very angry with me, I know, and perhaps I ought to have told you; but I had not courage for it. I have run away to be married to a gentleman I was engaged to before I left London, and that I thought had forgotten me. I did not dare to tell you; and I did not dare to refuse Mark when he offered to marry me, for fear you would find out. And then, as you are my guardian, you could have put me in prison and done all sorts of horrid things to me; so I thought it was better to accept Mark and let you all think I was in love with him instead of with anybody else, and then no one would get into trouble. Now I shall have a home of my own and a protector, and so I shall not be afraid to see you. You know I could not have married Mark. The idea was ridiculous; but I am very sorry if I have made him unhappy, only I hope he will soon get over it, as I suppose he will in time. And then perhaps Phœbe Greystoke will console him. I shall be pleased to see you all when I have a house of my own, if you will ever care to come; which I don't suppose

you will; and I will write to you again when I am settled.

"Your affectionate niece,

"LAURA CALHOUN.

"P.S.—I wish you would send my boxes to the Carlisle Station, to be left till called for. They are all packed and ready, you see."

So there ended the play, and the curtain "rang down," leaving one of the audience at least with a broken heart and a blighted life.

Mark read the letter through to the end without fully understanding it. All he rightly gathered from it was that she had gone. Gone away; with some one else; and she had never loved him. It was this which baffled him most. She had never loved him; why then had she feigned it? If it had not been for her enticements would he ever have *dared?* He did not blame her; he loved her too well for that; he simply was bewildered at it all. He did not understand reasons or conditions, and he stood for a moment with the letter in his hand gazing at it with a vacant stare as if his mind had gone in the shock.

"What is't, Mark?" said Mattie anxiously.

"Is she deid?" asked Isabella in a low voice.

"She's gane," said Mark in a wandering kind of manner. "Gane—to be wedded!"

"Mark! are ye mad?" shrieked Mattie. "What's that ye say? Wedded? Lowra? Wedded? and ye not the man?"

"An' I'se not the man," repeated Mark quite quietly, but as if he did not understand his own words.

"Then may she be stricken deid this varra night!" said Mattie, lifting up her hands passionately. "She's been t' snake we've warmed iv our breasts; may she niver see t' day when she can be til ither as she's been til us!"

"Whisht, woman!" thundered Mark, starting to his feet. "Niver a word agin *her!* A't wrang lies wi' me, not wi' her. I suld ha' tellt she was ower bonny, ower gude for me, and thof she took t' warst way she didn't mean it—she meant nobbut kindness!"

"Ye'se maffled and bedoited, Mark," said Mattie angrily. "I tell ye, lad, what's bred in t' bane 'll niver leave t' flesh. The mither was a bonny ane, but a bad un, and t' daughter's the marras of her mither!"

"Will 'te hand thee noise, then?" shouted Mark. "I'd liefer ye put a pistol til me than speak as ye're doing of her. It's mair nor I can bide, mither! God help me! I'se ganging mad!"

He rushed from the kitchen with a sob that struck poor Mattie's heart like a death knell, and in a few moments they saw him galloping wildly down the lane and across the moor to Carlisle.

That night Mark, half mad and more than half drunk, enlisted in the regiment stationed at Carlisle—the regiment in which Julius Dormer, Laura Calhoun's husband, was captain, but absent from to-day on a month's leave. And all that night, and all the next day, long and wearily waited the widow at Loanin' Head for that son who never returned, but who had vanished like a wraith from her sight, leaving no sign of his going.

It is not an unusual thing for north-country folk to be "off on the spree" for days, perhaps for weeks, at a time. Their families generally know pretty well where they are; and, save the annoyance arising from their absence from work and the useless expenditure of money, not much is thought or said about the escapade. The wife may resent it privately when the truant comes home; but the neighbours accept it as a quite natural occurrence, if less than commendable and even "a pity." When Mark therefore disappeared, Mattie, though she fretted sore, was not afraid. It never occurred to her to fear that he had done himself any injury; and as for enlisting—such an idea was far from the mind of the proud and honest landowner. She remained, then at Loanin' Head quietly, if dolefully, and trusted to time to bring all things round. It is a grand faith this of our brave and quiet northern folk! Time and patience do all with them, and man's free will does not

count for much. Still she made inquiries all round, but heard nothing; for when Mark came to his senses, and found what he had done and where he was, he grimly concluded that the best thing for him was to abide by his wild act, and try to forget himself and his past in the new life of the barrack-yard.

It is not to the purpose to go into Mark's experiences as a private. Suffice it to say he was duly examined, passed, set to drill, pronounced a fine fellow by the drill-sergeant, admirable raw material by the adjutant, "queer" by some of his comrades and "stuck up" by others; while even the dullest saw that something more than ordinary affected him, and that, though he was only a countryman, he had never been a subordinate and was in a sphere of thought and feeling different from anything familiar to themselves. So time wore on. The healthy hue of his handsome face gradually paled; the grand proportions of his frame grew leaner and more angular; the look of settled despondency in his eyes deepened into one of settled despair; and more than one indication showed a brain not quite securely balanced—only there was no one to read the signs, and no one who had any clue to the mystery of that sad maze in which he had lost home and happiness, love, station, self-respect and—himself.

Captain Dormer's month's leave of absence had come to a close. For a month now Mark had been missing

from Loanin' Head—as good as dead to Mattie and the farm; and Mattie's faith in time and patience had given way. The police had the affair in hand, but no one found the lost statesman in the red-coated private who drilled assiduously in Carlisle barracks, never asked leave to go out, never got drunk, told no one of his home or family and kept himself as exclusive as if he had been a prince at the least. Still they had the affair in hand; and they were stirring in it; and had come upon the traces of a bad job as they suspected—a very ugly-looking mare's nest which they were diligently overhauling; and while Mark was going on with the goose-step and "eyes left, eyes right," and Captain Dormer was installing himself and his pretty young wife in lodgings in the brave old city, the solemn police were puzzling over evidence which seemed to point to forgery, to murder, or to suicide—they didn't know exactly which—but to one or other if not all these offences combined, of which they supposed the missing statesman had been undoubtedly guilty.

It was a soft July day, when the evening sky was like a dome of opal and the air was as misty as a soft-spun veil; when the birds were singing with a glad yet subdued rejoicing; when those of the sons of men who were happy were doubly so for very harmony with all about them, and those who were unhappy were

more miserable still for the mockery which the universal peace seemed to bring their sorrow. It was evening band; and the officers and their wives were gathered round the stand. Among them was young Mrs. Dormer, the bride about whose marriage strange stories had crept out, and how that it had been a runaway match, and a gallant rescue from certain grim oppressors who wished to marry her to a brute for the sake of her money—for she was an heiress—and how probably there would be a lawsuit and an exciting social drama, all on account of her great fortune and her tyrannical legal oppressors. So that the little lady who had entered the regimental world with the *prestige* of a romantic history and the repute of wealth, as well as with the evidence of beauty and a pretty if somewhat underbred manner, which all could see for themselves, was in her glory. Surrounded by admiring faces; conscious that her toilette was what a Frenchman would call of the most ravishing description; really as yet sufficiently well pleased with her husband, with whom, however, she foresaw a squally future when some part of the truth should become known, she let the happy moments fill her with their own joy. Forgetting cousin Mark and aunt Mattie as entirely as though they had never existed—forgetting the heavy milliner's bill that she had incurred, and her husband's confessed impecuniosity—forgetting the "awful row" there

would be when Julius found out the truth, and that her whole fortune was one thousand pounds and not one thousand per annum—she played her pretty part as the young bride to perfection; as she had played that of Mark's *fiancée* at Loanin' Head, and gathered up the hearts of the regiment in a very sheaf of adoration.

So they all sat and listened to the band, till the music came to an end and the listeners dispersed. Then Laura, leaning on her husband's arm, made a turn round the old square; and in doing so, passed a group of privates ranged against the wall. She turned her head towards them, surveying them graciously, as one who did not disdain even the poor and who wished them to share in the contemplation of her beauty equally with their betters.

Suddenly a cry, a shout, rang through the courtyard. One of the men rushed forward and seized her more frantically than roughly by the hand.

"Lowra! Lowra!" he said—"my ain love! my darling! my cousin Lowra!"

What happened then no one was ever found who could exactly say. Blows were struck, a crowd gathered, the guard turned out, the young wife shrieked, the husband swore; and Mark, raving, wild, and crying to her not to be afraid, he would come back to protect and claim her, was marched off to the prison

cells; and before the morning broke the Queen's shilling had brought into her service only a strong man stricken down with madness. There was no pretence of "brain fever" in his case. He was simply wildly and ungovernably mad; and Laura's trial came upon her sooner than she expected, and in a different form from what she had anticipated, as she found too late, when aunt Mattie, who had got word at last of her son, walked into the barrack-yard and heard the whole story.

CHAPTER VI.

NEMESIS.

LAURA and her husband were sitting over their dessert. She had had great difficulty in persuading him that there was some mistake—that the mad private who had insulted her was not the cousin of whom she had spoken so bitterly, but a quite distant connexion of her aunt's ("all these odd Northern people are connected, you know, just like Scottish clans in that"), she had said disdainfully—and one whom she had seen only once or twice and had never spoken to in her life. She was reckless and beside herself with fear, the little lady, and ran her feet into a net that was to lame her for life, while thinking she was keeping clear of even gossamer threads.

Julius was more than doubtful however, of the whole transaction. It looked odd, to say the least of it, he said; and he was sulky and suspicious. But she had succeeded in bringing him just a trifle round to believe in her pleasant fictions, when a noise was heard on the stairs and a woman's voice cried out: "I will see her!

I will! She's my sister's bairn—my ain niece—and it's as much as yer life is worth to haud me back!"

The words were scarcely uttered before the door burst open and aunt Mattie, pale, fierce and avenging, strode into the room. At sight of her Laura shrieked aloud and tried to fly; but the old woman seized her by the arm and held her.

"An' ye are sittin' here wi' yer fine things aboot ye, an' my puir lad as ye've murdered is liggin doun in t' cells yonder," she said; "an' God doesn't strike ye dead!"

"Who is this woman?" asked Captain Dormer loftily. "Laura, what *is* this strange mystery?"

"Mystery, ye ca' it? Mystery? Ay, ye're mebbe reet! T' mystery of iniquity, t' mystery of wickedness, that's what I ca' it! T' mystery of a bad heart as could'n't du better nor breck ane o' t' best as ever bet! What cull hed ye to du it, lass? T' lad wanted nowt wi' ye till ye coorted him yersel'. He wad niver hae lifted up his een til yer face gin ye hadn't amade him. Bella's tellt me mair nor I knew afore. Bella, she seed ye kiss him in Leddy Coppy when ye was hoisted in his arms; and mony's the time she's watched and waited on ye and seed ye carry on wid him mair kind nor modest. An' ye air her husband?" she continued, turning to Captain Dormer. "Tak t' woord o' yen wha kens her—she'll match ye! She'll play ye fause. She

cooms o' fause bluid; tho' it's my ain father an' mither baith were her forbears; an' she's tied to gang t' same way as her ain minny. She's begun by deceiving me an' my lad, an' she'll end wi' ye!"

"Oh, aunt Mattie, how can you be so cruel?" sobbed Laura, turning to her husband. "Hush! hush!"

But Captain Dormer put her aside. "Tell me," he said to aunt Mattie; "is all this as you have said? Did my wife—your niece—did she, as you say, court your son?"

"As true as there's a God in heaven!" answered Mattie, raising her quivering hands with a passionate gesture. "They were promised; and were to wed. I niver liked it; but he—he was set on it, my bonny bairn! an' he was his ain maister."

"You never liked it? Was not my wife's fortune sufficient temptation?"

"Her fortin! What fortin? Less nor a thusan' pund, all told! We've gitten mair nor that in t' bank," she said proudly.

"A thousand a year," repeated the Captain.

"Havers! The lass hasn't a full thousand; an' sae I tell ye."

Then looking from each to each, the truth seemed to break upon her, for she cried out as if in sudden pain and sat down in a chair trembling.

"An' it was for this my bonny bairn is in t' cells!" she wailed.

"Now, we will have this out," said Captain Dormer sternly; and though Laura flung herself on her knees and sobbed aloud, and threatened to kill herself if it went on, her husband was immovable; and by degrees got from Mattie the whole of the bad and sorrowful story, and learnt too clearly who and what it was that he had married with so much haste, such chivalrous determination to thwart the designing relative who held her captive.

It was not a pleasant moment for the Captain. His wife the one-time *fiancée* of a private in his own regiment—the niece of a broad-speaking farmer's wife—next to penniless where he had looked for a handsome dower—unscrupulous, untruthful, untrustworthy!—What had he got? A trim waist, a pretty face, a pleasant manner; and that was all! Poor material for a life's wear, with such coarse and ugly threads through the fabric where the need of beauty and perfection was greatest! However, bad as things were, they had to be accepted now; and though Perseus would have been glad to have had his Andromeda sent safe back to her old rock and devouring monster, the thing was impossible; and the only wisdom was to make the best of what was bad enough at the best, but wherein one had been as much to blame as the other. Only there are degrees in guilt, thought the Captain when his conscience reproached him; and Laura's was so great it blotted his out of sight altogether.

It was not a difficult matter to buy poor Mark's release. Mattie was "warm" enough for that without leaving herself or her family cold by the process; and after the necessary preliminaries had been gone through, the Queen's defaced shilling's worth was released from his military confinement and handed over to his friends, ruined, wretched and undone. By degrees however, with good care and nursing, the fever of his madness passed and he was able to take his place again among them as of old; no longer like Walker's young god in fustian, but a silent, moody, miserable man, from whose life had gone all its sweetness, all its hope; and who lived in these two prayers—"Let me see her again!" and "O God, grant me that I may befriend her before I die!"

Ten years had come and gone since Laura Calhoun had crossed the moor with Captain Dormer. Things had not changed much at Loanin' Head, save for that inevitable change which comes with time. Mattie had grown old and sharper-tempered than of yore; Isabella had passed from the stage of giggling girlhood into that of a staid and capable womanliness—she was keeping company now with young Greystoke Phœbe's brother, and if that doesn't sober a lass, she used to say, nay then, nowt will! Mark was looking gaunt and old; prematurely old. The furrows in his face were as deep as those in a man of fifty; his thick brown curling hair was thin

and growing rapidly grey; his very gait was changed to the heavy slouching step of a much older man than he was by years; and those light blue eyes of his which once were so vacantly innocent, were full now of dreams and sorrow and yearning thoughts that never left him. So he followed on the slow sad track of time, and waited—he scarce knew for what; but he waited, in a kind of dumb and patient hope that some day his reward would come. And if not his reward, then his release.

Work was done, and Mark was busy in the little garden that bloomed before the parlour window. Perhaps it was by a little touch of pitiful madness still remaining that he insisted on keeping up this garden in all the trimness and prettiness created for Laura's pleasure. It was his one sole amusement, poor fellow; and even Mattie, to whom the girl's name and memory were accursed, could not find it in her heart to interfere or try to prevent what she saw was such a solace—albeit perhaps a dangerous and decidedly a morbid one. But indeed, Mark was more difficult to do with in these later years than he had been in earlier times — more impatient, more headstrong, and less affectionate or reasonable. It was his mind, Mattie said in excuse, when he had been more difficult than ordinary; and so the trouble passed, and the end was ever the same—he had his own way.

Always at the same hour he used to go into the little garden and work among the flowers. If it were nothing more than tying up a heavy-headed carnation, or pulling out a downy "clock" or a rampant bit of bird-weed, it was sufficient to give him pleasure from the sense of keeping up Miss Lowra's garden, with which he associated all the sweetness of his past. And this calm, still July evening he was working in the little plot as usual, his thoughts travelling back over this long blank of ten years: — ten? they were more than a hundred would be to those blessed ones who have never passed through the fire to have their youth burnt out of them!

Slowly, painfully, crossing the moor while Mark worked in the garden, came a weary, shabbily-dressed woman in widow's weeds, holding a child in each hand: a woman who might have been a beggar of the better sort, she was so shabbily attired, and bore so unmistakably the marks of want. The children too, were wan and thin, with the keen eyes of constant hunger looking sharply about them for the chance of finding something to eat:—it was so long since they had tasted food! They were too listless to be irritable; too well accustomed to their misery to be importunate; they knew that mamma was poor and had nothing for them, and so, with the terrible wisdom of experience, they accepted want and cold and hunger as their inevitable

portion; though they sometimes wondered why they did not have as much bread as other children had, and if they would ever get a good dinner by the grace of fairy fortune, as they read of in story-books. Perhaps nothing but the children's need would have sent that miserable woman across the moor and up the lane to Loanin' Head, to ask for bread at the door of those whom she had so terribly wronged.

The evening shadows were lengthening and the weary steps of the woman drew nearer. At the beginning of the narrow high-hedged lane she stopped and sat down on a stone by the wayside. How well she remembered the day when she had sat there in the June sunshine, plucking the petals from a daisy one by one, and waiting for her Fate! It had come as she waited; and what had it brought her? From her own deception had sprung mistrust, angry words and indifference soon reaching out to hatred. Captain Dormer, disappointed and angry, had done as many men beside him have done—flown to gambling, drink and all manner of coarse and fierce excitements, as the best means he could devise for forgetting his anxieties.

From bad to worse is but an easy step; and he had made it—and between vice and crime there is but the glance of an eye, the pause of a minute; and he had gone beyond both. When the warrant was made out, which ordered his arrest on the charge of forgery, and

when the constable came to take him, Julius knew then that the game was up and that his misspent life had come to an end. It was a catastrophe which he had foreseen and provided for—a catastrophe which a small bottle of prussic acid ended with less circumlocution than a legal process. And all things considered, perhaps it was the best he could do. His death left Laura absolutely penniless; and, misery having few friends, she too, poor soul, had sunk step by step, till now, as we have seen, she had come to absolute hunger and a stage not far removed from beggary.

Then she bethought herself of her relations; and for her children's sake humbled her pride so far as to decide on crossing that well-known moor and asking help from those she had injured. It was a heavy trial; but she undertook it; and perhaps in the self-suppression necessary for the effort she gained something more of nobleness than she had yet known. But indeed her sorrows had purified her. She could not shut her eyes to the fact that she and she alone had wrought all this misery to every one;—and this, not by the necessity of fate, but of her own freely-willed wickedness, her own falsehood, selfishness and treachery. And seeing all this, the "joy in heaven" over the sinner that repenteth had place for Laura; and the woman, sad, footsore, hungry, who sat on the wayside stone and prayed, was a far nobler being than the

bright, bewitching girl who had played with an honest heart for wantonness and wrecked two lives for vanity.

The sun was sinking; the children were hungry; she must on to the bitter end. Faltering and faint she walked slowly down the lane, and so through the paved yard and to the kitchen door.

Mattie was sitting by the fireside half dozing over her knitting; Isabella was away in the croft with young Greystoke Joe; Mark was tying up his flowers in his "lady garden," when Laura and her two children stood on the threshold and humbly knocked at the door.

"Who's yon!" said Mattie, rousing herself and speaking in a startled voice. The dog was barking, and the frightened children began to cry and clung to their mother.

"Dang ye, ye noisy brute; gie ower!" said Mattie to the dog: to the children—"Whisht, bairns! he'll not mell on ye! What's yer wanting?" she continued, getting up and coming to the door.

Laura laid her hand on her arm. "Aunt! do you not know me?" she said very quietly, very sadly. "I am not worthy to come to you, but my children are starving!"

"Ye! is it ye, Lowra!" shrieked the old woman, starting back. "I cursed ye ance, I curse ye now again! Frae my hoos, Lowra! ye've broughten sorrow and ill enow here afore!"

Laura shrank back as her aunt came close upon her with uplifted hand and a kind of solemn wrath upon her face. Her first impulse was to turn and fly, but the maternal love which had brought her so far, kept her to her place. She pointed to her children, and said in a low voice: "Not for my sake, aunt, but for theirs —they have done no ill!"

Mattie turned away with a great sob. True woman as she was, the appeal for the little ones was more than she could bear. "They'se dune nae ill, i' faith!" she muttered. "Puir weans!—starving,—eh, lile Ruth! an' here's plenty!"

The slow stride of a man came round the house side.

"What's a' the stour?" he said. "Mother! what's to do?"

He looked at the unknown widow standing with bent head and drooping figure by his door—at the pale, thin, frightened children. "Is it meat she wants, an' are ye denying?" he asked. "Shame on ye! gie it, mother, an' t' lile uns too! They look as if they needed it!"

At the sound of his well-known voice Laura covered her face in her hands; then with an effort she lifted up her head, and their sad eyes met.

It was with scarcely so much surprise as sorrow that he saw her. Day by day and night after night he had thought of her so intensely, so vividly, that it would

never have been matter of surprise if his thought had taken shape and she had suddenly stood before him. But he had always thought of her as she was—as the bright, young, bewitching creature whose loveliness and grace had been angelic to his rougher humanity.

He had never thought of her as he saw her now—shrunken, bowed, pale and poor—a suppliant where she had been a queen. With no touch of the old art, but with a sudden outburst of passionate remorse, of pity for him too, old and changed as he was, of pity for herself, of anguish for her children, Laura flung herself at her cousin's feet.

"Mark! Mark! can you forgive me!" she sobbed, lifting up her tearful face to his in pitiful despair.

"Eh! not thier, my leddy lass! Lowra, not thier!" cried Mark, lifting her up and holding her to his heart. "Here in my arms—to my heart, my lass! Nae! what it's a' yer ain. Ye are mine, an' I love ye! An' ye've come back to thy ain, my lass! God! but I'se thankfu' for this day!"

He said no more. With a heavy sigh he tottered backward and fell; and for many a long day yet to come, poor Mark Todhunter was holden between life and death, and none knew which way the balance would turn.

It came right at last. Care and love got him through; and Laura won back her aunt's love by her

devotion to the man whose life she had so nearly destroyed. The doctor himself said that Mrs. Dormer's nursing had been worth more than all his drugs; and Laura used to look something like her girlish self for joy when he said so. By the autumn time Mark was fully re-established, and by autumn time Isabella went to church with young Greystoke Joe; and when she had flitted, then Mark spoke again, and Laura, with a flash of her old self—and yet, how changed!—stole softly to him, and putting her arm caressingly round his neck, said in a loving whisper: "If you love me, Mark, I love you, and will be your true wife to the end of our days."

"The Lord bless thee, my leddy lass! Eh, but I knew thee was t' best as iver trod!" said Mark with a fervour, a passionate tenderness that smote on her heart as only such forgiveness, such trust can do, when we have been unworthy and are sorry for our sin.

So the tender little flower of happiness which had been so nearly cut down for ever, blossomed up from its roots once more. The joy that the angels felt for the repentant sinner was repeated in this quiet Cumberland home; and Mark, married to Laura as she was—sinful, sorrowful and with all the glory of her youthful beauty dimmed—was a happier man and with a nobler home-life than would have been, had not her sin led her through sorrow to repentance and a truer

knowledge of the real worth of human life. Fustian, farm-work, rude speech and hands with the marks of toil never wholly washed away, were nothing compared to the love, the honesty, the noble truth, the infinite tenderness, the unselfish forgiveness of that loyal heart. And it was by Heaven's grace that she who once, shallow, vain and worldly, had been unable to appraise any of these things at their true value—to whom life had been merely amusement, finery and superficial gentility—was now brought to a knowledge of how far beyond the form is the spirit—how far greater than Society is the Man.

HER REVENGE.

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I.

She was one of the most beautiful women to be seen on a long summer's day, as the phrase goes, and one of the proudest; a woman for young girls to worship as if she had been a goddess, and for whom men might go mad in the passionate despair of a love that would not be returned; but somehow not one to whom the poor or the sorrowful would naturally go for compassion; not one whom children caressed or in whom dogs confided. Not that she was cold. Her pale grand face, more like that of a queen of old romance than of an ordinary woman of modern times, was not the face of one who could not feel; but for all its underlying power of passion it expressed more reserve than sympathy, more strength than tenderness, and that kind of heroic self-respect which holds falsehood as dishonourable rather than sinful. She could love. No changeful eyes such as hers, no mouth so full and firm when in repose, so sweet

and sad when it smiled, ever belonged to a woman that could not love. But, let her love till her heart broke with the weight of its own passion, she could never submit to the will or the weakness of the man dear to her. She might give royally of her own free grace; she could not be made to yield for the sake of peace or by the law of womanly subjection; nor would she ever forego one line of the deference due to her as an uncrowned queen among women. She knew that she was beautiful and that she could make all men her slaves whom she chose to win. She had only to smile, to be gracious, and the thing was done. So that when she married, though what the world calls well and better than she had the right to expect, she married with the idea that she had secured a slave for life and bound a captive to the chariot-wheels of her beauty so long as she chose to keep him in bondage. That she had married into duties, including those of complaisance and submission, was as far from her thoughts as that she had no longer the right to the splendour of her own loveliness.

She married in Italy—the rich Neapolitan prince, Anselmo di Loredano; but she, the penniless daughter of a bankrupt English squire, thought herself infinitely the superior of the two, and that by race and education, breeding and religion, she was on the heights and he in the hollows. She had none of that enthusiasm for Italy

and the Italians which makes so many western women lose their heads and hearts together. On the contrary, though she liked the country—who would not?—she despised the men and thought them a soft, untrustworthy, undignified set of creatures who raged like children and cried like women when things went wrong or their feelings were touched.

When she fell in love with Anselmo di Loredano, she made an exception in his favour. She held him to be better than his race, and, as she used to say with a left-handed kind of compliment, more like an Englishman than a Neapolitan. He was nothing of the kind. He was Neapolitan to his finger-tips: a fine, magnificently-formed young fellow, handsome as a dream, soft-mannered, sweet-tempered, affectionate and the most adorable lover to be found in a country where love-making is a natural gift cultivated by art and perfected by practice; but without the rudiments of what we mean by morality; not knowing the meaning of duty, of truth, of self-restraint in his desires; caring chiefly to be happy and to see every one else happy about him; and always more ready to slip under a difficulty than to meet it, to soothe by a falsehood than to rasp by the truth. All the same he had the wild blood of his race, and would have used the knife without much compunction had his blood been up; but he avoided causes of anger as disturbing to his pleasures, and with the frame

of an athlete and the potentialities of a murderer, lived like an Epicurean whose one sole endeavour was to let the days slide easily and to gather his roses with both hands.

He had fallen in love with Sabina d'Este simply because she was beautiful. What were her tastes, her temper or her habits, and whether they would suit him and wear to harmony in the long-run, was nothing to the purpose. She had great deep-blue eyes, a cloud of red-brown hair, a pale clear skin, and a faultless figure —tall and queenlike—and he married her as he would have bought a picture that had taken his fancy, or a house with a pretty balcony and a fine *façade*. And she married him because he fascinated her with his devotion, his splendour of person, his perfect temper—which was not insipid—and because he was rich and she was poor, and she was tired of knocking about the world—taken publicly to market by her mother who wanted only to sell her to advantage. All the same she loved him better than, proud as she was, she cared to let him know. Neither, as time went on, did she ever confess to him what a grief it was to her that she was childless; though he, less reticent than she, lamented loudly and pitied her and himself incessantly. Like all Italians he was passionately fond of children; and like all men with estates and a title he longed for an heir to carry on his name and inherit his possessions. But

years passed and no little child came to gladden him or to soften and subjugate her. It was a cross; but crosses have to be borne when they are laid on us, and to kick against the pricks only drives them deeper into one's flesh.

There was one thing for which Sabina respected her husband—he was not idle. He had a farm somewhere by La Cava, Amalfi, Sarno, Castellammare—she never quite made out the exact locality—but a place to which he gave a fair portion of his time, and of which, manlike, he was evidently fond. Twice she had told him in her grand way, as if conferring a grace, that she would like to go with him to this farm; and twice he had answered with his sweet smile and graceful acquiescence that nothing in the world would give him greater pleasure than to take her. But though everything had been arranged, somehow the thing fell through on both occasions; and though they had been married now some four years, Sabina had never visited the *fondo* where her husband spent two days at the least every week. Once he was there for three weeks at a stretch, with only the interval of a day now and then when he came back to Naples unable, he said, to live without her any longer. This was about a year after they had been married. Another time, about a year after this, he had stayed away a whole week. A favourite mare had been ill, he said when he came back,

full of eagerness to see his queenly wife again. Now she was quite well; the foal was a beauty and he was *tanto felice!* So happy indeed, that he made her smile —it must be confessed almost as contemptously as lovingly—at the boyishness, the intensity of his satisfaction because a favourite animal had had a foal and the new creature was beautiful and a thoroughbred!

II.

In a lonely part of the hills about Corpo di Cava stood one of the most beautiful little houses possible. Conspicuous from the lower land because of its double-arched *loggia* always glowing with flowers, it was difficult to find—the way to it being a tortuous and intricate lane continually crossed by others just like itself, all running between high stone walls which prevented any observation of the surrounding country. And even when you got there you could see nothing; for the gate was a solid wooden door; the grounds were circled by a vineyard and orange-garden; what would have been with us the carriage-drive was a narrow path under a *pergola* thickly covered by vines; and high stone walls concealed the place as effectually as if no house existed there at all. But when admitted you found a fairyland of beauty; a place full of flowers

and sunshine and peace and loveliness, and the oddest possible mixture of simplicity and luxury. The people who lived there were evidently not of the order of conventional gentry; but neither were they ordinary peasants. Even the pretty little wife, who was the simpler of the two, was not the untidy, slouching, ill-dressed, unbrushed signora of a *fondo*; and though she wore a peasant's costume the materials were rich and her ornaments costly. And the husband, though manifestly a man of breeding and education, was as little like a high-born signore as he was like a *contadino*.

Indeed, he was neither. He was an artist—one Giacomo Paoli, whose studio was in Naples, where he had to be the greater part of the week, but who was never so happy as when he had finished his work and could come down to the lovely chestnut woods and vineyards of Corpo di Cava, and to the beautiful little bower where he had his home and his home's best treasures. His wife was the miller's daughter from a small hamlet near Caserta, whom he had met one day by chance carrying a pitcher of water on her head, fallen in love with on the spot, and married; then brought here to this sweet solitude which she never wanted to leave and whence he never offered to take her.

He had educated her taste since then, and made her, not a lady in the ordinary sense—that would have

spoilt her charm—but an ideal kind of creature, simple and yet refined; beautiful, yet ignorant that she was so; young, yet contented with her quiet days and tranquil life; finding in her handsome husband, and lately her child, all the happiness that she needed; and for the rest too indolent to desire more and too ignorant to hold herself defrauded because she had no more. She was the perfection of a certain type of Italian woman—soft, silky, caressing, loving; half a child and half an animal; but restful to a man who wants both peace and dominion, and whom it fatigues to encounter opposition or to be made to think.

There could not have been two more opposite households than those of the Prince Anselmo di Loredano and the artist Giacomo Paoli. As mistress of the one was a proud reserved Englishwoman of independent thought and invincible will; a woman ashamed of her own emotions and contemptuous of human frailty; resolute for truth and honour; demanding a lover's unbounded homage as her personal due and the man's subservience as one of her rights of womanhood; in habits of life strict, punctual, stately, conventional; never tripping, never faltering in what she thought right, but always grand and grave, and so far, noble; a woman with whom love, how deep soever it might be, included something like awe and never led to familiarity. The companion of her servants and the dogs, the cow

and the goats, was the so-called mistress of the other; soft-skinned, dark-haired, laughing, loving; with big beautiful brown eyes that were like the eyes of some animal, soft and tender, but without speculation or thoughtfulness; a broad, full, handsome mouth made only for grapes and kisses; a face like a peach in colour and one of Guido's *amorini* in expression; a round, supple, graceful figure, but on the way to become loose and large; a caressing sleepy manner by no means statuesque or queenly; a woman full of sweet good-tempered acquiescence, quick passion, ready tears and still readier smiles; without opposition or independent will; caring only for her child and the sunshine; laughing when her husband came home and when he was away crying a little and saying "Pazienza!" often; delighted when he brought her a coral necklace, a silver pin; and when things went wrong praying to Madonna and the saints with as much certainty of faith that they would put them to rights as she was sure, when a child, that her mother would get that thorn out of her finger, that eyelash out of her eye.

When Giacomo came home they were like two children for happiness, and like young animals in their play; creatures for whom the sun shone and the fruit ripened, but for whom there was no to-morrow and no yesterday, and as little dread as regret. She was the sweetest-tempered and most contented thing alive, he

the most loving and adorable; and life flowed fast when they were together—for their love was still fresh and young, though it had lasted for three years now, as their little son, just two, reminded them; their home was paradise all round; and Giacomo Paoli, the Neapolitan artist, was the happiest man in the world, as was Concetta, his wife, the miller's daughter near Caserta, the happiest woman.

III.

The Princess di Loredano one day again asked Anselmo to take her to that farm of his where he spent—for a prince—so much time; but whence he brought so few visible results. He smiled and promised willingly.

"Yes, certainly; the next time I go," he said, looking at her with his soft eyes full of love.

"When do you go? Next Thursday, I suppose, as usual?" she asked.

"Yes, *carina*; next Thursday."

"I wish to see it very much," said Sabina graciously.

"You honour me, my queen," was his answer, as he kissed her forehead; then left the room a little hurriedly.

But when next Thursday came he had slipped away early, leaving a note for her saying how sorry he was,

but that he had received a telegram at five o'clock that morning requiring his instant presence in Rome, and he had not liked to disturb her. He forgot that telegrams do not come so early in the morning as five; but Sabina did not—though she suspected nothing wrong, and only thought it odd.

When he came back from Rome she began to talk to him about his farm. She was becoming curious about this place of her husband's industry; not from doubt nor vulgar inquisitiveness, but because she was getting to love him even better than before as time went on and his sweet, placid, radiant temper called out a response in her own heart which was going near to breaking down her pride.

"What do you do there?" she asked, looking interested.

"A hundred things," he answered smiling. "We make cages and mousetraps among others," he added, laughing like a boy.

The idea that he, Prince Anselmo di Loredano, occupied himself in making cages and mousetraps seemed to amuse him immensely.

"What an extraordinary idea!" said Sabina coldly.

It might amuse him but somehow it annoyed her. She had no sympathy with frivolity. And if he did manufacture mousetraps and birdcages on that farm of his? well! it was an industry like any other; as

serious as that of making wine or macaroni, and not to be spoken of as a game at play.

"You really must take me," she said again in her stately way, as if conferring a grace by her condescension.

His bright brown eyes shone like stars; he showed his small square glancing teeth.

"I will, *carina*," he answered. "I would have done so last Thursday but for that telegram which took me to Rome."

"It came at a very unusual hour," she said a little dryly.

To which he answered quite naturally:

"So it did; but I can always command the public offices. It is a way we Neapolitans have."

Then suddenly changing the conversation, he told her how superb she looked; no one in the world was so grand as she, his queen, his Semiramide! And sitting at her feet he sang to the mandolin the sweet little Neapolitan song: "Io ti voglio bene assai;" and looked as much love as he sang. When he had ended, he said:

"And yet this is almost too simple for my queen! It would go better with a little Neapolitan peasant—such a one as I once saw at Caserta—who loves the sunshine and laughs all day long with her child."

"The same language that would suit a peasant-woman would hardly do for me," said Sabina superbly.

"No," he answered with a laugh.

After a time Sabina began to see that her husband would not take her to this mysterious farm of his, where he made mousetraps and birdcages and whence he brought neither wine nor oil, neither macaroni nor corn. She was too proud to be suspicious of any cause why she should be shut out, but too arbitary to submit to such exclusion. She took up the question gravely one day, and said straight out that she saw he did not wish her to go; and what could there be in this farm which he was ashamed of her knowing? she asked royally.

He laughed in his gay light-hearted way, and assured her that nothing would please him better than to receive her there; but—more seriously—it was not the kind of thing which Italians did, and he did not wish her to commit an eccentricity.

His explanation did not satisfy her; and, proud and determined as she was, she vowed to herself that she would go down to that farm without her husband's consent as she could not induce him to take her, and see for herself what he did and what it was like. She only bided her time—till Carnival should be over.

To do honour to this great national *festa* and to remain with her, his beautiful queen, Anselmo told her that he would not go to his "work" as usual. He would remain in town all the time, and over Ash

Wednesday as well, which, being a good Catholic, he held as a day of concentrated holiness wherein that occupation of his on the farm would have been unseemly. And to please her he gave himself no small trouble in devising various costumes for the fitting display of her beauty, while the decorations of his balcony were more magnificent than those of any other in all Naples. The house was crowded with guests and the whole thing was a dazzling success; or rather would have been had not the Prince been called away on Monday, by some mysterious business to some undesignated place, leaving Sabina surrounded by her friends—among whom he took care should be two or three women of that age when surveillance comes as a matter of course, because participation is no longer possible.

They all amused themselves however, in their gorgeously decorated balcony; where Sabina as Semiramide looked her part to perfection; where every one aimed the choicest bouquets; and whence rained down a ceaseless fire of flowers and smiles for the beautiful, of keen repartees for the witty and audacious, and of pretty trifles for the children; so that the house of the Prince di Loredano became one of the most noted features of the *festa*.

Among the carriages and masks that drove or ran or walked along the Chiaja was one group of three in a

common *carrozzella*, that seemed as much attracted by the house of the Prince and the company in the balcony as were the last by them. They were a sailor—that favourite costume of the people—masked; a very pretty woman with an uncovered face in national costume; and a beautiful child with a bow and quiver and little gauzy wings, looking the Cupid he represented. This group drew up before the Loredano palace. The masked sailor—like to whom? thought Sabina—held up the laughing child with one hand, and with the other motioned for a flower, making the little fellow ask too with that pretty southern gesture of entreaty; the woman laughed like the child and repeated the action, making some remark to her companion. The guests leaning over the balcony flung bouquets and *dolci* by the handful; and then Sabina, with a smile, took good aim and landed a ball, which she herself had worked and decorated, full in the lap of the woman.

The sailor took off his hat and bowed; the pretty peasant sent up a shrill "Grazie!" the child clapped its hands, and, prompted by its father, waved its baby acknowledgments; and then the *carrozzella* drove on, and they could see that the masked sailor was laughing as he caressed the child and spoke familiarly to the woman.

They passed no more after this, and the day wore

into the evening without any adventure worth recording.

It was late when Anselmo returned from his interrupting affairs, but he was full of eagerness to know what Sabina had seen and done, and how she had enjoyed herself. When she told him of the sailor and the peasant-woman and the lovely child dressed as Cupid to whom she had given a ball, he laughed like a child himself—he was so immensely amused at the joke. He certainly was the most good-natured, most easily-pleased, and amiable man that could possibly exist! she thought, charmed with his ready sympathy in so small a matter; and never since her marriage perhaps, had she felt so lovingly for him as at this moment when he praised her for her grace to these passing maskers, and told her that this was the way in which Italian hearts were won.

All the same, there was that farm of his which she had made up her mind to see, and the fitting time was at hand.

IV.

The gipsy was a tall and handsome-looking woman—so much of her as could be seen; but it was rather difficult to make her out very clearly; for her coal-black hair hung thick over her face; that face itself was swarthy

almost to blackness; and the yellow-and-red handkerchief, twisted loosely round her head with the ends hanging down, rather concealed than revealed the shape of her head and the form of her forehead and neck. Her laced bodice, white chemisette, and large coloured kerchief were all noticeably clean but of poor material; and she had the grand and almost regal air and attitude which some of these women have as their birthright. Such as she was, she attracted the attention of Giacomo Paoli the artist as he was hurrying across the station at Naples; but she was stooping over a basket as he passed, and he saw nothing but the mere outline of her figure, with the face too much foreshortened and too much concealed by the hanging raven hair to serve as a telling sketch.

When he got out at La Cava he did not see her, for all that she was standing quite close to him; but she was hidden behind the angle of the wall, and though she could hear all that he said she could not see him nor he her. What she heard however, made her set her teeth tight and draw her breath hard; while her eyes blazed out from under her heavy locks like the eyes of a woman whose pride and passion are roused till she has become as dangerous as a wild beast. A stupid kind of countryman, acting as servant, came up to him and told him that his horse was ready as usual; and he furthermore said that La Signora Concetta asked him to

bring home some medicines from La Cava, as *il bimb* was not very well.

"*La creatura!* My Angiolo not well!" cried Giacomo Paoli in a tone of dismay. "What is it?"

"Only a little fever since the Carnival," said the man.

"Only!" said the artist, as with a passionate exclamation he threw himself on his horse and thundered down the hill into the town.

"Who is that man?" asked the gipsy of the porter when the artist had gone.

"Signore Paoli, the artist from Naples," he answered.

"And the farm of the Prince di Loredano?"

"We have no Prince di Loredano here," he said, roughly resenting the haughty tone in which she spoke to him; and she nothing but a gipsy!

"Where does Giacomo Paoli live?" she asked again imperiously.

"Where should he live but there?" he said, pointing to the house standing out on the heights opposite. "Are you going to give him a number, or will you give it to me instead?" he added rudely.

She turned away, not even thanking him; and took the road down the hill into the valley below, where the artist from Naples had ridden.

At La Cava, Giacomo, standing by the door of the chemist's shop, saw that grand-looking gipsy-woman

again, and noted the daring harmonies of her colours and how well they blended. Anxious as he was about the child, he found himself turning back more than once to look at her as he rode between the walls which led to Corpo di Cava. At the little village which lies at the foot of the long ascent, he turned back to look at her once more. She was walking steadily on in his direction, but when he turned again she was gone. Then he put spurs to his horse, and was soon through the tortuous lanes and before the heavy wooden door which shut in his paradise from the world outside as effectually as the maze shut in fair Rosamond's bower.

The gipsy wandered all the long day about the lanes, but never found the house which had been pointed out to her as Signore Giacomo Paoli's. She was too feverish, too nearly mad with pain and passion—her trust betrayed, her pride outraged, her love slighted—to know how the time went, or to feel fatigue or hunger. Her sole endeavour was to find this house which was like an enchanted place that faded away as she came near it. She made it out from the heights to which she climbed, as she had made it out from below. She recognized the *loggia* with its double arches and wealth of early flowers, and she thought that she could find her way to it through the lanes; but when she came down into the same place the high stone walls hid all that lay behind, and she passed the gate again

and again without knowing that she was close on the traces of the man who in Naples was the Prince Anselmo di Loredano her husband, and here in Corpo di Cava Signore Giacomo Paoli the artist, the husband of some one else and the father of a child.

As she was passing by the door again, she heard voices in the garden—the voices of a man, a woman and a child—all laughing together like creatures too happy to be mindful of anything but their own enjoyment. She recognized the voice of her husband, whom the women called *carissimo* and the child *babbo*, and whom he in return addressed by all the fond and endearing terms taught by love and claimed by trust —words of endearment which he was accustomed to give to her, and which she would have died rather than have shared with another. He and the woman were playing with the child, running to and fro for short distances. She made out that they were throwing a ball; and soon had proof of their play; for her husband, throwing it high to amuse the child, aimed badly, and it fell over the garden-wall. She picked it up. It was the ball which she herself had worked and dropped into the peasant's lap at the Carnival. Then she understood it all—her husband's interrupting business, the mask, the pointing hand; and the insult conveyed in this little incident galled her as much as the graver wrong had wounded.

She placed the ball in her basket, then turned away and had just time to hide herself behind the pillar of an open gateway which stood to the left, when the three came out into the lane to look for the missing plaything. But, hidden as she was, she could see them all—the man who had deceived one woman and betrayed the other; the pretty little peasant-girl who believed herself his wife; the child of their love who bound them together with a tie stronger even than that of his passion or her beauty—a tie denied to herself, that proud, English, childless wife, whom this little daughter of the soil had displaced and humiliated.

There was little use in looking. The ball was gone, and no search of theirs could find it. The child cried passionately; the mother did her best to soothe him; and the father took him in his arms and caressed him tenderly. He was distressed at the grief of the *creatura*, and the gipsy clenched her hands and looked up to the sky with a savage smile on her dark face. The tears of the child were the first-fruits of the revenge which had to come, and showed her the direction of that revenge as clearly as if it had been by intentional design. She saw the vulnerable spot; and there she would plant her arrow. In this world the innocent have to suffer for the guilty; and the innocent mother and child had to suffer for the sins of the husband and father.

Then she turned away, as they all went back into the garden, and thought what she could do to perfect her revenge.

She found in the high woods a small deserted hut which had evidently been built as a shelter for wood-cutters, and as evidently disused for some time. Here she could pass the night without fear. Fear! She knew no fear. She had only the one burning desire for revenge, and an almost preternatural sense of caution and prevision.

A woman in a lonely *fondo* had given her bread and wine, part of which she secreted in her basket, and for which she had paid by one of the pretty trifles that she had thrust therein when she left Naples, as a *raison d'être* for her appearance. She wanted no more refreshment, as she wanted no more information. She had heard all that she cared to know—how, among other local gossip, the house with the double-arched *loggia* belonged to a gentleman who came from Naples, but did not live here; how his wife was not of these parts at all and not known by any of the neighbours about; how she lived like a saint, occupied with her child and her house, and leaving the garden only to go to Mass and Vespers like a good Christian as she was. There was nothing else to be said of her. And to be able to say nothing is the highest praise that one Italian woman can give another.

All that next day the gipsy lingered about the neighbourhood, waiting until her husband should go back to Naples on the third day, as he always did. She hid herself again behind the wall of the broken gate where she could hear and see without herself being seen; the woman at the farm again gave her bread and wine, and at night she slept once more in the deserted hut. And when the morning broke she took up her position as before, and waited for the fortune of events.

Presently she heard a horse's hoofs in the lane before that heavy solid door, and the voices of her husband, of the woman and the child coming down from the house through the vine-covered *pergola*. Fond words, sweet adieus and tender caresses passed between them, as so often had passed from him to her who was now watching and listening. He was exhorted to take care of himself and get his work done soon; she, to be careful of the child and herself and to love him till he returned. The little fellow, Angiolo, begged for a ball like that which was lost, and his father promised him liberally; and then the artist, Giacomo Paoli, mounted his horse and rode off to the station at La Cava, whence he would alight at Naples as Anselmo Principe di Loredano.

"And now my time has come," said Sabina, as she leant her head on her hands and thought how best it could be done.

V.

Only to Mass and Vespers. Well, then, she would wait till the bell rang out for prayers. Servants are less vigilant than a mother; and she would find the occasion. Hopeless as it looked, with the more than ordinary seclusion of that small household, she knew that she should find it. As it came about too surely; for when the peasant-woman, who thought herself Giacomo Paoli's wife—when poor, sweet, smiling, tranquil-hearted Concetta went to the little church in the hamlet below, the heavy wooden gate was left ajar, as the girl in charge of the child stood for some little time out on the road, looking about her before she went back into the grounds. She went but half a dozen steps away; but just those half a dozen too many. They carried her past the angle of the wall; out of sight of the broken gate leading to the untenanted *fondo* opposite; out of sight of that heavy wooden door always kept so carefully shut and secured; and they gave the gipsy the opportunity for which she had been waiting. Quick as a flash she darted across the narrow road and slipped through the open door, hiding herself among the orange-trees of the garden. There she crouched and watched, like a wild beast lurking in its lair, waiting for the moment when it can make its spring and bring its victim to the ground.

Nearer and nearer she threaded her noiseless way, crouching, cautious, always creeping nearer to the house, protected from observation by the orange-trees among which she wound her way.

The sun was sinking, and the child was sitting cooing to himself on the little step that led from the orange-grove into the flower-garden. The girl had filled up his lap with flowers as his playthings to keep him quiet, while she went into the house to see that his evening *zuppa* was ready. She suspected no evil would come in leaving him for a few minutes there alone. What evil indeed, could come to him in a place so secure as this? She saw nothing of that dark-faced crouching woman stealing ever nearer, nearer, like a panther following its prey; she feared nothing hurtful in the orange-garden where they had their playground and where she hid behind the trees and the *bambino* found her as a lost treasure, and shouted for joy when he had discovered her. She was talking and laughing to Luigi the cook about the *bimb's* last pretty ways—when suddenly a shawl was thrown over his head; he was caught up in two strong cruel arms; and with the same noiseless tread as before, the gipsy crept through the darkening grove and was out in the intricate winding ways long before the girl returned and her charge was missed.

When the loss was discovered and the search began,

Sabina was up in the wood, safe from detection in the deserted hut which no one remembered stood there at all.

The little fellow did not cry. He seemed too much stunned to be frightened; but sat on the mud floor of the hut silent and as if paralyzed; so long as the light lasted looking alternately into her face from the ball which she had given him; but not moving, not smiling, not speaking. When the darkness was complete, he fell asleep as if he had been at home; and she laid him on a bed of leaves and covered him carefully.

Then the gipsy began her transformation. In the rivulet that ran by the side of the hut she washed the dye from her skin, and hid among the dead leaves of the chestnut-trees the long black hair that had fallen in such heavy concealing masses about her face and neck. She took off the bright red-and-yellow handkerchief that she had worn, and put on the long scarf of a widow which hid her hair and changed her whole appearance; she stripped the sleeping child of his pretty fineries, and tied a handkerchief round his head that hid his golden curls as effectually as her own; and thus, retransformed into a peasant widow with a poorly-dressed baby in her arms, she set out in the darkness and took the road to Salerno. As she passed near the house where the wife of Giacomo Paoli lived, she heard

a woman's wailing cry, and smiled again, as she had smiled once before, with savage pleasure at the thing which she had done.

At first she had thought to kill the child, now at once and on the spot, and lay the dead body at the gate of his mother's home; but no, their torture should be longer, she said to herself. They should have to wait before they knew the worst; wait till hope had died and suspense had become so terrible that even the worst, known, would be a relief from what was dreaded. Perhaps, had he cried, she would have killed him. Half mad as she was, she could not have borne that; but the pathos of the little fellow's bewildered patience, the very dumbness of his terror, if it did not touch her heart at least neither irritated her nerves nor made her fear for her own safety. She spared him then for the moment; for good or ill; for present ruth or future torture, she saved his life now; and by the first train of morning was off to Naples unsuspected and undiscovered.

From Naples she passed on to Rome, and there she said to herself that she would kill him—out in the desolate Campagna where they would be alone, with no one to check her or betray her. She thought it all out as she sat in the train, holding the child in her arms; and gloated in imagination over the anguish that she was preparing for that false hearted husband

of hers, and for the woman, presumptuous as well as sinful, who had dared to invade her rights and destroy her peace. She pictured the gloomy sunless day, with the cold north wind blowing sharply off the snowy mountains; no sound of human companionship about—only the barking of the fierce Campagna dogs, now near, now far off—creatures themselves as formidable as the bandit-looking herdsman to whom they belonged and to whom killing would come easy for a few soldi as the reward. And then she would take the dead child to them in their sunny garden-home at Corpo di Cava, and watch them in their agony. She pictured all this while the child leaned against her bosom, pale, patient, silent, bewildered—looking at her intently with his large sweet serious eyes, but neither laughing nor crying, neither speaking nor smiling—only looking, looking, as if she could be looked into womanly pity by the force of childish innocence and helplessness.

And all this time she bought for him, now bread and now fruit, or soup or cake; thinking that, as he had to die, he might as well be kept happy for the short time allowed him. He was to be the victim that the crimes of others might be punished, but he himself was not sinful. And she was too proud to be small in her methods, even of punishment. Besides, though she would not have acknowledged it even to herself, there was something in holding the creature in her arms, in

feeling him lying on her burning breast, that was comforting; she scarcely knew why. She thought that she was feeling a savage pleasure in holding her revenge, embodied in him, thus pressed against her heart. She did not think that it was because she was a woman that it was pleasant to have a child in her arms, though the child of her perjured husband and an insolent rival. All the same he had to die; and it was her own hand that should kill him.

She took a miserable lodging in Rome, and soon had to arrange some material details of her life before that fatal journey into the Campagna. Her money had run short, and she must get work whereby to live. Her only power of self-support lay in her embroidery, and she had to find a patron before she could commit that murder. She was not sorry to postpone the time. It was so much more agony heaped on them; and there had never come the day fit for her mood. The weather had been bright and sunny, and she could not kill the creature in the sunshine. It was not for any weakness—certainly not!—not for pity, not for faltering; but because the sunshine would not harmonize with her feeling. She wanted her revenge to be complete in all things—even in the fitness of the atmosphere. But to-day—this sunless, gloomy day—yes, to-day she would go. The child was no trouble to her, truly. It was rather something that lightened the terrible weight

of the savage despair, the thirst for revenge that oppressed her like an enduring nightmare. But it had to be done; and it should be done to-day.

She called the little fellow to her; his hat and warm coat which she had bought for him in her hand.

"Come," she said; "come, Angiolo! We are going out to see the flowers."

He came up to her running.

"Mamma!" he said, putting his hand on her face, speaking for the first time since she had carried him off.

"Mamma!" he said again, and laid his little lips on hers.

She neither wept nor shuddered, neither felt remorse nor weakening of her ultimate resolve. Something however, came into her throat that made breathing for the moment difficult. She thought it was consideration for herself, for her own sudden tiredness, when she muttered:

"Not to-day. It shall be to-morrow."

To-day she took him into the Borghese gardens outside the walls, and let him pull the violets and anemones undisturbed. It should be to-morrow; meanwhile let him breathe the fresh air and be happy.

She sat under a tree like any other peasant-woman, while he ran backwards and forwards with grass and weeds and flowers, indiscriminately heaping them into

her lap, and always laughing and saying: "Mamma!" when he came. It was as if the cloud which had fallen on his brain since the moment when he was taken away had lifted, and he was once more conscious of life and the sunshine.

That night he was restless and disturbed—the reaction of excitement had been too much for him; and the next morning he was in a high fever, his life in as much danger as if he had been out there in the Campagna, with only his own innocence to stand between him and an outraged woman's thirst for revenge.

And now her time had come. She had but to sit still and let nature do the work; or lay a steady hand for one moment on the parched mouth to stifle the sobbing breath for ever. God was working for her; the sacrifice had been divinely ordained. But when the little creature cried for water, how could she refuse him? Water would not keep him alive. When he tossed in pain and fever, and looked with those large yearning eyes into her face, and held out his arms and cried to be taken to her heart, how could she refrain? To make him so far easy would not stay the hand of death. He was to die; as surely as any condemned criminal for whom the gallows is already set up; but meanwhile she was not a torturer if an executioner righteously avenging her wrongs; and to soothe him

in his pain, to soften, so far as she could, the rugged way which those little feet had to tread alone, was only human, not weak.

She sat and waited, so she thought, for his death. But, as a matter of precaution, that the neighbours should not think she was wilfully neglecting the child and by her negligence causing his death, she called in a physician and so far silenced suspicion. She need not give the medicines, she thought. She would say that she had, and show the empty bottles in proof of her obedience to orders; but she need not give that cooling draught, that quieting dose—or too much perhaps? Too much, and the thing was done for ever!

She held the bottle in her hand, hesitating, resolving. His bright blue eyes, pathetic, dumb, beseeching, looked full into her face.

"Mamma!" he sobbed faintly, and still looked at her as if he knew her thoughts.

She put the bottle down on the table.

"My child, my own, my Angiolo!" she said, lifting him tenderly to her breast, while she kissed his feverish face and her tears fell over it like rain.

VI.

No peals of joyous laughter came from the house where the happiness of the parents and the joy of their child had once nearly made that watching gipsy-woman mad. It was in the sweet spring-time, when the flowers of the vine send out their faint fragrance and the luscious odours of the orange-blossoms fall in cascades through the air; but the two within the gates sat in the desert which had once been their paradise, and felt nothing but the pain of their loss and the anguish of their suspense. Even Anselmo, pleasure-loving and averse from sorrow as he was, had to bear the burden with the woman whom he had deceived and whom his wife had punished so pitilessly; for if he could have consoled himself for the loss of poor Concetta, as he would have done, he could not console himself for the loss of the child whom he loved better than either wife or mistress; and besides, he was afraid to leave Concetta in the state in which she was. Left alone in her despair and her bereavement, he did not know what madness she might not commit; and retirement fitted in only too well with his own condition. His wife had gone—disappeared like a stone in the water—and no trace of her could be found. He did not wish that it should. He knew now who had been the gipsy that had

attracted his attention on the platform and on the road to Corpo di Cava; and he knew who had stolen the child. The whole story was too ugly to bear the light, and he prevented the search which he seemed to direct. Meanwhile, he had to stay with Concetta as much for precaution as for love; and he found the time heavy, and life as it was, even to one to whom life was so pleasant, scarce worth living! Sabina had truly avenged herself; if not in the form at first designed, yet heavily.

It was all still as the grave when, carrying the child in her arms, she came to the well-known gate, now standing ajar as if there were no longer any treasure within to guard, nor secret to conceal. She pushed it open and went in; the shade of the *pergola*, dark with the last of the evening, hiding her effectually from observation. The little fellow looked about him vacantly. He had been away four months, and did not seem to remember anything that he saw. When she carried him step by step up the path of the house he neither laughed nor spoke, neither called out nor cooed, as in the old bright times. No memory was awakened in truth; for a cruel work had been done that was even worse than death would have been; and the fever, which had been the direct consequence of the terror of that fearful moment when he had been carried off, had clouded his brain for life. She had taken away a

healthy, happy, laughing intelligence; she brought back a living death, mute, mindless, senseless, and destroyed for all the purposes of life for ever.

The two miserable creatures were sitting in the garden beneath the orange-trees, both too unhappy to comfort each other or to see that the light had fallen and the evening had come. They heard the sound of feet, and Anselmo called out sharply, asking who went there? Guided by the voice, Sabina cut across the garden and suddenly appeared before them, with the child in her arms. She placed him on the ground before Concetta, who, with one wild shriek of joy that was pain, caught him to her breast, sobbing and laughing together; but Anselmo, with an oath, seized his wife by the throat. She shook him off and looked at him as proudly as in the old days before she had learnt to love him, when perhaps he had come too near or spoken too warmly in his own suit.

"I have brought back your child," she said in a low monotonous voice; "but for *her* sake, not yours. With you"—she curled her short upper lip and held her head still higher—"traitor and liar from the beginning, I have no dealings!"

She turned away grandly, superbly, and would have gone out, but Anselmo caught her again by the shoulder. A hand raised high in the air; a flash of glittering steel cutting through the dusk of gloom; a

strange sharp sound; and with a stifling cry Sabina fell to the ground stabbed in the back.

"No, no! She brought me back my child!" cried Concetta, kneeling by her pitifully, while the boy dabbled his hands in her blood, smiling vacantly.

"For the child's sake, I forgive you," said Sabina, raising herself with one supreme effort and looking at Concetta; "but for you, traitor, my curse is on you for ever. May God forgive you no more than I!"

Vine and orange-blossom, rose and carnation, all were as sweet and lovely to the sense now as they were last year, when the Neapolitan prince was the homely artist, and the miller's daughter of Caserta knew herself the proudest mother and believed herself the happiest and most honoured wife. But fragrance and beauty were gone, never to be renewed, for the man who at any moment might be denounced as a murderer, and for the woman who had learnt at last the truth of her shame where she had believed in the sweetness of her honour. But they could not part. That ghastly secret hidden away there at the roots of the orange-trees, though it had blighted their love and killed their happiness, held them indissolubly united. He dared not leave Concetta to fall under strange influences which might make her betray all; he dared not let the place to those who might turn up the soil and find that

murdered creature beneath; he had to stay there to keep watch and ward over his own safety; and pleasure-loving, careless, loose-lived, and loose-lipped as he was, this solitary life with a broken-hearted woman and an idiot child was a punishment that fulfilled Sabina's dying curse to the full. It would have satisfied even her revenge could she have seen it; or would she have pitied what was only revenge not redress, and what had destroyed the innocent even more than the guilty?

MY COUSIN JAMES

MY COUSIN JAMES.

I DARE say I was a cross to them at home. I can understand it now on looking back, though at the time I suffered quite as much as they did from the terrible want of harmony between us. But how could I help it? There was I—a tall, strong, healthy girl, full of life and energy, longing for something to do, yearning for the right to feel, the power to *live;* and there were they—my father, a confirmed invalid; my mother, a nervous woman whom I never remember in a good temper, and who found even our quiet life so full of pains and troubles and anxieties she used to sit down and cry over them, when she did not scold; my sister Nora, twelve years older than myself, nearly as delicate as my father and quite as nervous as my mother, besides holding it as a canon of faith immutable that to be lady-like a woman ought never to show feeling, or energy, or any form of excitement—that, in fact, she ought to be as wooden as a doll, and about as lifeless. It is easy to understand what a dreadful creature

I must have seemed to them all; and how mutually unsuited we were to each other.

I stood five feet six, was strong armed and largely built; more like a boy than a girl in my tastes; delighting in dogs and horses, boating and crag-climbing (we lived among the dear old mountains) and utterly unable to sit in the house like other women embroidering strips of muslin or reading trashy novels, which were the chief pleasures of my mother and Nora. They scarcely ever went out, even in the summer; and always had the blinds down and the windows closed. They used to shudder at me when I came into their neat, twilight drawing-room, bringing great clumps of snow on my boots, or patches of mud, or bits of hay or straw or bark, according to the season; and when they heard my step striding through the hall, they used to sigh plaintively; and I have often heard them say, in their injured tones: "Here comes Ida again; she walks just like a man!"

And I dare say I did. But they did not know, and would not see, how often I used to try and walk gently, and take little short steps, like Nora. To be sure, I could never keep it up, and was forced to go back to the old swift stride natural to me. But I tried; which was something in my favour, if they would but have acknowledged it.

I often thought in those days that I could not be

papa's or mamma's child, I was so utterly unlike them; and unlike Nora too. Papa and Nora both were small and dark; mamma was fatter and larger than either, and fairer even than I; for her hair was pure flaxen and mine is very nearly red—a dash more and it would have been really red hair; as it is, I believe it is auburn—but I was as unlike mamma as I was unlike the others. And if papa had not had a brother, to whom he said I bore the most wonderful likeness—a brother who had gone out to California when he was quite young and had never come back again—I think they too would have believed that I had been changed at nurse, and that I was a stranger to their blood as I was to their sympathies. As it was, the Californian brother saved my dear old Mary's credit; but certainly he did not make my parents any the better satisfied with their unlikely daughter.

So I lived till I was seventeen, practically without control or education, but always in disgrace—always trying to win favour but never succeeding because I never knew when I offended; wondering why I was such a black sheep, and trying to feel that I was naughty and abominable and that I deserved displeasure; but somehow I never could quite get to it. I knew that I wished to please, but as my strength and health and size were my offences it is not difficult to understand why I did not attain my wish. "You are so big,

Ida!" they used to say reproachfully; and oh, dear me! how many tears my large thick boots and gloves at seven and a quarter, have cost me; how many tears my appetite! Yet I really could not eat less than I did; and I was always hungry as it was, for they used to give me such little bits!—and I was ashamed to ask so often for more. They were all more or less invalids, and as they never went out, or took any exercise, of course they ate like birds; but I was always in the open air doing something that gave me an appetite; and besides, I was growing fast and I had superb health, so naturally I did eat an enormous quantity compared with them; and that used to vex them. In fact, my whole manner of being, the person that I was, used to vex them; and there was no remedy for it anyhow.

When I was seventeen the first great change came to our quiet household. Nora married. I was thunderstruck when she told me, which she did only the week before. I was a great goose, I fear, for though I was dimly conscious of something going on in the household, I had not an idea what it was; and as I had been accustomed to be shut out from all family confidences and taught not to ask questions, I had not troubled myself much with what did not concern me. I thought Nora was joking when she told me. She had always declared she never would marry; and I had

believed her. And then she was so prim and staid, and to my insolence of youth she seemed so infinitely old—nine and twenty!—and she looked forty. It was all incredible to me, look at it how I would. However, I soon found it true enough. She married—and of all the men in the world, the one I most hated, the Reverend Alexander Tagart—a pale, thin-lipped, austere man of about fifty, whose whole code of righteousness lay in the denial of everything natural and healthy. He and I had never got on well together, the antagonism between us having been pronounced from the beginning; so I was naturally not over pleased at his entrance into our family. Things had been bad enough for me before, I knew they would be worse now. And the sequel proved I was right.

Nora's marriage killed poor papa. He had been in bad health to begin with, and the excitement, quietly as the wedding was managed, was too much for him. And then he fretted for her. They were so exactly alike in everything that he felt as if part of himself had gone—at least, he used to say so; and he fretted so much that in about three months after she left he died. And was it not cruel?—they would not let me see him when he was ill! They said I was so loud and noisy, and so big, I should disturb him. This was Mr. Tagart's doing, I am sure; and when I cried about it to mamma and complained of the cruelty, she only said peevishly:

"It is your own fault, Ida; you should be gentler and more affectionate than you are, and obey us when we tell you anything, and then perhaps you might have seen papa."

Soon after his funeral poor mamma died quite suddenly, of heart disease—fat about the heart, the doctor said; but Mr. Tagart always insisted on it that I killed her. We were at dinner, she and I; and I had been for a long ramble by myself over the fields; and I certainly had come in awfully hungry. It was a brisk, clear, frosty day, and I had been out for five hours and had walked and scrambled full fifteen miles. Mamma was not well that day and would not eat; and I remember we had a large piece of roast beef; and I remember too, her horrified look at me when I asked for a second plateful. I shall never forget it!

"What! *more*, Ida?" she said in a reproachful tone, as if I had done something wrong.

"Yes, please, mamma dear; I have had such a long walk and I am so hungry," I said.

She cut the meat, I remember, quite passionately—cut me off a huge bit—a *chunk* fit for a plough-boy, and quite flung it on my plate. She looked very angry. Then she gave a deep sigh and sank back in her chair. I was too much ashamed to look at her, so I ate my meat in silence; and when I had finished I asked if I should ring the bell? She did not answer, and she

looked so pale and strange that I was frightened, and rang loudly for Jane; and Jane sent for the doctor at once; but when he came he said she was dead and had been dead for more than half an hour. Poor mamma! I don't like to think of that moment!

"See what your unruly appetite, your selfishness and greediness have done!" cried Mr. Tagart when he heard how it all happened; "you have killed your mother!"

I was left by my father's will under the guardianship of Nora and her husband until I came of age, when I should have about five hundred a year of my own, through my grandfather. Nora, as the eldest, had double that; for papa had left all his fortune to her, and she had, through mamma's father, the same as I. So, as soon as the funeral was over, I went back with the Tagarts to Cracroft Vicarage which was henceforth to be my home; at least for the next three years and a half. "Not a day after," I said to myself by way of promise and consolation; "I will bear it for three years, because I cannot help myself; and I will bear it as cheerfully and good-temperedly as I can; but after then—not an hour."

So you see I did not enter on my new life with any expectation of happiness, nor with any cordial feeling on my own side to sweeten what I knew to be Mr. Tagart's dislike and Nora's disapprobation. I was

tired of trying to win favour I had not deservedly lost; but I meant to make the best of everything; and I was not an ill-tempered girl.

Had I been misunderstood at my own old home? I soon learned to look back on my life there as one comparatively rich in sympathies and love. I had suffered in my large, noisy, healthy childhood in a house of nerves and sickness, but it was all as nothing compared to the torture of my brother-in-law's rule. Heaven forgive me if I speak of him too bitterly, but I cannot think of him calmly even yet; and the less so because all his cruelty, his evil temper, his tyranny and injustice, were in the name of religion and for the honour of God and Christianity. He set himself to tame me, he said; he would not continue the mistake which my father and mother had made—the mistake of indulgence—and let me run riot in my godless and unfeminine career; he had undertaken to subdue my proud defying spirit, God helping him; and he owed it to his own character to succeed and to bring me into a state befitting the household of a Minister of the Word.

All this was right enough, so far as it went; but we split on the question of what was wrong and what was unbecoming in a clergyman's family. He made out that almost everything was wrong. I was not to ride; neither he nor Nora rode and they would not let me go alone or with only a groom. This last, Mr. Tagart

said, was "dangerous;" but I really could not see how, and I could never get him to explain. I was not to take long walks; indeed not to go out of the garden alone; and I had no walking companion. I was not to dance, even if I had the opportunity, which was not likely at Cracroft; but if a dance had been got up among the girls I should not have been allowed to join in it, for Mr. Tagart always said that dancing was the direct road to hell. I was not to sing, except Calvinistic hymns which I did not like; and it was the same with music. All that I might do without rebuke was—at the first—to teach in the Sunday-school under the superintendence of the teacher of the first class, a tailor's daughter with correct views on baptismal regeneration; and to take part in what my brother-in-law called parish-work. But he soon forbad me even that, because, he said, I taught unsound doctrine and sowed tares. This was because I once said that the very strict and narrow people seemed to think themselves consecrated to the task of putting God's work to rights. Mr. Tagart was so angry with me for saying this!—and punished me by praying at me, and not speaking to me, for more than a week.

You can understand now something of what my life must have been. I think that even Nora was sorry for me; but I never knew. Her husband had so completely dominated her that she seemed afraid of having an

opinion of her own; and if he had put a pair of handcuffs on me she would not have dared to take them off. I used to be sorry for Nora however, whether she was so for me or not. I don't know if I threw away my sympathy, for she never complained, never said she was unhappy, though certainly she never said that she was happy. I think she held it sinful to be very happy; and unlady-like as well; but I fancy that she had got rather more than she had quite bargained for in her husband, and that he made even her, frigid and narrow as she was, feel cramped and chilled.

I had no female friend of any value at Craeroft; indeed there were none to have. There was only one family with whom we could associate on equal terms, the Lawrences, of the Hollies; and they were not very fascinating people. They were just common-place country girls who took a tremendous interest in all the village gossip afloat, and to whom the every-day affairs of domestic life were of more importance than the most stirring events of current history. Whether the jam was to be made to-day or to-morrow was of far greater moment to the family at the Hollies than whether the Prussians or the French would beat; and a change of servants outweighed in their esteem the rise or fall of empires. I used to wonder at their want of sympathy with all outside their own circle; and they used to wonder at me for feeling so much as I did about things

in which I was not personally interested. When bad news once came over about the Commune, and I could not keep the tears out of my eyes in speaking of it—for I was an ardent republican and believed in the Commune—I gave them a week's amusement, and my brother-in-law occasion for a sermon on the damnable sin of rebellion, which lasted over two hours and made my head ache. This was what he called preaching the Gospel to me.

There was a half-brother however, at the Hollies, who used to come down at vacation time—he was at Cambridge, in his last year—with whom I fraternized more than with any one else. He was not quite like the rest, being broader and more liberal-minded; and he seemed to understand me better. He helped me with my studies too; for I was too energetic to live in idleness and too real to be satisfied with dreams; so, as Mr. Tagart had cut me off my usual amount of physical energy, I was forced to fall back on books and hard study as my resource; and Guy Lawrence helped me.

I should have liked Guy much better than I did had he not been going into the Church. But I had taken such a horror to the profession since I had known Mr. Tagart, that I at times included Guy himself in my antipathy, when I thought of him as a clergyman. Poor Guy! my best, and indeed my only friend! I

did not always dislike him, you know. In general I liked him very much; but when I thought of him as a clergyman—solemn, austere, unnatural, tyrannical, as I felt sure he *must* be—I used almost to hate him. Poor fellow! he must have been immensely puzzled by my changeful ways towards him; but he was always the same to me—always good and kind; and really, for a man who was not my ideal of a man at all—who did not ride or hunt or shoot or do anything I thought a man ought to do—I liked him very much. And then he was so clever! He knew all about everything, as it seemed to me; and more than this, I was grateful to him for liking me as he did, and letting me think as I liked and say what I thought without telling me I was going to perdition and that I was prompted by Satan, as Mr. Tagart used. One gets to this almost craven gratitude for tolerance and sympathy when one has been kept long enough in an atmosphere of repression and antagonism.

Time went on, and my life at the Vicarage became even harder. I would not give way under it—else what was the good of being strong and healthy? But it was a hard fight to keep up and not let myself become either peevish or crushed. But I think the better I bore it and the more cheerful I remained, the more angry Mr. Tagart was with me and the more determined he was to break my spirit. One day we

had a tremendous quarrel. We seldom quarrelled, because I would not. I never answered him when he was insolent and abominable, but to-day he was so outrageous that I was forced to defend myself. It all began about a mere trifle—a handful of wild flowers which I had brought in and had left on the sideboard; but it ended in an explosion of wrath on both sides, and bitter words that were anything but trifling. I scarcely remember now what I said, but I do remember that he said I was accursed and a child of the devil; that God had forsaken me and given me over to the vile imagination of a reprobate heart; and a great deal more of the same kind. When it was all over, I went down into the summer-house at the bottom of the garden, to get myself cool and think out my position calmly. And I had not been there long before Guy Lawrence came in. Guy had never seen me so cast down. In general I used to keep my troubles to myself, and show a bright face under them all. I was too strong and healthy to fret. But to-day I was utterly undone; and when my only friend came in I fairly broke down, and at his first word of kindness burst into tears like any silly school-girl. The poor fellow was in an awful state.

"Don't! don't, Miss Beecham! Oh, what is the matter? Don't do that; pray don't!" he kept saying.

But I could not restrain myself. It had been a hard

matter to bring me to this; but now that I had failed, I failed entirely. So I wept and sobbed as if my heart would break, and took no heed of the fact that poor Guy was kneeling beside me, with my hand in his, which he was alternately kissing and crying over. Or rather, I did take heed of it. But it was so soothing to my bruised nature that any one should show me affection—any one care for me—that I could not repel it. And thus, partly in despair at my present miserable position which seemed to my exaggerated fancy interminable—for had I not two whole years to wait?—and partly for gratitude at finding myself loved by any one, I let Guy Lawrence keep my hand; and I promised that I would be his wife. I knew that I did not love him as I felt I could love; but I did not expect ever to see my ideal and I had a very tender regard and respect for him. So, desperate and self-deceiving, I gave him my promise, and repented of it the instant after. Mind! I do not wish to exonerate myself. I did wrong; only I did not know at the time *how* wrong.

Strange to say, Mr. Tagart did not oppose my engagement with Guy. On the contrary, he approved of it with a certain grim satisfaction which struck me at the time as meaning more than it expressed. I have often thought since that he saw how entirely unsuited a shy, reserved, sensitive student like Guy Lawrence was to such a girl as I; and how the restricted life of

a country clergyman's wife would have told upon me. I think he saw in it a life-long punishment for me, which he was glad I had inflicted with my own hand. He might have looked upon it as a means of grace; he said he did; but I had learned by now the real meaning of his religious phrases. However that may be, he spoke of my engagement everywhere; and there was something in his manner in speaking of it that made me feel as if I had put myself into chains which he had padlocked. My sister said very little. Only once she looked at me rather anxiously, and said in a kinder voice than usual: "Are you quite sure of yourself, Ida? quite certain that you love him as you ought? You are very young!"

To which I answered cheerfully: "Oh yes, it is all right! I like Guy Lawrence better than any one I know, and he has always been good to me."

So no more was said; and my engagement was the recognized fact of the neighbourhood.

I think I told you that papa had a brother in California?—a man who went out when he was quite young, and who had married and settled there. We used to hear of him occasionally, but we did not know much about him. We knew that he had married a half-caste, and that he had a son James; and that was all. You may imagine our surprise then, when the post brought a letter to Nora from uncle Rowland, telling us that

we should see his son James, who had taken a fancy to run over to the old country—James himself, our cousin, adding a few words of his own, saying that he would be down at Cracroft to-morrow, having been in England a week.

I never saw Nora or Mr. Tagart so angry. I do not know what they expected to see; but they spoke of cousin James all that evening as a "savage;" and really, if he had come in a wampum belt and with a row of eagle's feathers round his head, brandishing a tomahawk and uttering a war whoop, they could not have expected anything more dreadful by the way in which they spoke. As for me, I was glad. Whatever my cousin James might be, he would be a relief to the monotony and deadness of our lives. So the evening passed; they breaking out into angry lamentations at this unwelcome advent and I trying to look at the matter cheerfully—till I saw I made them worse; and then I held my tongue.

The next day I was in the garden, on the lower walk, when I saw, coming along the lane at the foot of the meadow that skirted the garden, a tall, singular-looking man. It was a cool pleasant day in June; but the man striding along the road, with a longer step and quicker movements than are usual to Englishmen, wore a velvet coat belted round his waist; his hat was one of those soft felt things which take all manner of shapes,

and was drawn close over his eyes; his dark hair was long and curling on to his neck; he wore over-boots that came up to his knee; and he carried a huge knotted stick. As he came along, apparently half lazily, in reality very swiftly, he looked up at the house and then at me; then he strode across the fence that divided the field from the road and came right up the meadow to where I stood by the hedge. I knew at once who it was.

"Guess you are one of my cousins?" said the stranger in a rich, full, flexible voice, but with a decided American accent, and in a short, abrupt manner.

"Are you cousin James?" I asked; and I felt my cheeks grow hot.

"Sure as life," he said. "And who are you?"

"Your cousin Ida."

"Cousin Ida, shake hands."

I held out my hand across the sweet-briar and privet forming the hedge, and he grasped it heartily. Then he quietly strode over the garden hedge as he had before surmounted the meadow fence, and looked about him curiously. But he looked most at me.

"I like the looks of you," he said with his abrupt manner. "Sit down awhile; I'm tired walking; tell me about yourself and the others. I don't know one darned thing about my British relations, and I want to be posted up before I meet the old one."

"There is no old one to meet," I answered; and I began to tell him about poor papa and mamma; but he interrupted me, and said, not rudely nor impatiently, only with the frankness of a man accustomed to the simple truth: "You needn't tell me about that. I know it all. I want to hear about your sister; Nora, ain't she? *She* must be pretty old, I reckon."

"I don't think she would like you to call her so," I answered, laughing.

But he did not seem to see there was anything to laugh at. He was evidently a grave man; and laughter seemed to come but seldom to his lips. He only repeated, with a kind of insisting manner: "She is thirty-one! older than me by four years; and that is no chicken, I guess."

Then I told him about Nora and Mr. Tagart; and I thought I spoke very guardedly about them both, but especially about him; but cousin James, who had been looking at me from under his broad-leafed hat brought close down over his eyes, suddenly said: "You don't love that brother-in-law of yours?"

"Love him! no, I certainly don't *love* him," I answered lightly and evasively; "but I did not say I disliked him."

"I didn't say you did," said cousin James quietly; "but you don't like him, anyhow."

And to this I made no answer.

"Never you mind them," said cousin James, laying his broad hand on my shoulder and still looking at me with eyes that seemed as if they saw right through me. "While I'm here none of them shall hurt you, cousin Ida. I'm glad I've come. I'm glad I've seen you first. You and I are to be friends, you know." He took my hand in his, laying it on his palm and looking at it. Then he kissed it, and passed his finger down the veins, saying: "What a pretty, strong hand! That's the hand I like. You are a grand creature, cousin Ida!"

"I think we had better go into the house," I said, a little disturbed and with my face on fire.

"I think so too," said cousin James gravely.

So we went up the garden, neither of us speaking; but when we came to the door he laid his hand again on my shoulder, and said in a lower voice than he had used before: "We are friends, cousin Ida; that's a fact, ain't it?"

And I, looking up at him as he stood, tall, erect, and with such a fearless and yet such a tender expression in the handsome face that looked into mine—so far above me, tall as I was—answered hurriedly: "Yes." But it seemed as if both of us had said a great deal more.

If Nora and Mr. Tagart had disliked the idea of cousin James, they disliked the reality ten times more. It was quite painful to see their horror of him, only

because his clothes were cut differently from ours, and because he was not up in all the minor matters of etiquette to which we attend. I had never thought either of them very profound observers, but I certainly did not expect to find them so shallow as they were. They saw nothing of cousin James's goodness, nothing of his bravery, his uprightness, his truth, his self-respecting nobleness of nature; they only knew that he spoke with an accent, said "I guess" and "I reckon;" used odd words and not always impeccable grammar; kept his hat on in the room—and his hat itself was a sin; tumbled the antimacassars which he called "darned rags;" disregarded gates and doors; and went over hedges and out of windows if it suited him to do so; that, in fact, he was as they said "a savage," and to be despised accordingly. And it was just this "savageness"—that is, this truth and unconventionality—which charmed me. It seemed to me as if I had never known a real man until now. And we were such friends! He had such a quiet, unconquerable way of doing things that even Mr. Tagart was subdued. And when he proposed that I should go for this walk or that ride with him, how much soever Nora and her husband disapproved and were annoyed, they had to give way. Cousin James would listen to no objections. You see they had no hold on him. I don't know how it was done, but with the most absolute unselfishness he was

utterly uncontrollable and did exactly as he liked. I think a quarrel to him was something so serious that he had no idea of the small ill-tempers in which my brother-in-law and Nora indulged, and so he really did not see them. He had that large kind of allowance met with only in the very strong—in men and women who can afford to be generous. He was graver than most men, more silent but not sad; it was more a kind of serious earnestness, as would be natural to a man who had always lived in a certain amount of danger, in the midst of a larger, grander nature than we have in England—and in solitude.

Oh, indeed he was grand! How glad I was that I had such a cousin! And then the relationship was so delightful! Though a stranger, he was of my own blood—like a brother whom I must treat with just a little formality, but whom I might love as much as I liked, without harm. How unlike that dreadful so-called brother, Mr. Tagart! Here was my true brother! my dear, dear friend! my perfect man! How I delighted in him! how glad I was he had come!

Guy Lawrence was not at home at this time. Of course, cousin James knew that I was engaged; Mr. Tagart told him so before he had been half an hour in the house, and really I thought he might have left my private affairs alone. I could have told cousin James myself. He never spoke about this engagement to me

after the first time; but the look and tone with which he took both my hands in his, and said: "I will wait till I see this lover of yours, cousin Ida," did not pass from me quickly. What did he mean by waiting? He would wait to do what?

He could not mean wait at the Vicarage, for he was always running off in the oddest way. He used to come down to breakfast and say that he was going away that day to the Isle of Wight, or the Highlands, or Cornwall, or Wales, or Paris, or Ireland; as if he were going out for a walk; and places that we should have taken weeks to see he would do in a couple of days, and speak of them as "pretty little rat-holes" afterwards. Nora and Mr. Tagart used to be furious with him when he did so; but he made me laugh; and I could understand how a man used to the Sierras and the Cordilleras, and those great rolling prairies and pampas, should find our finest scenery in England small and tame in comparison; but Nora and Mr. Tagart would not see things in this light. They used quite to scold when cousin James laughed at the pretensions of Black Gang Chine to sublimity, and when he said that Skiddaw and Scawfell were only "mole-hills of a respectable elevation."

Well, one day—the day when Guy was expected home—cousin James came into breakfast with his velvet coat, his knobbed stick, and his hat over his

eyes—he never carried any luggage—and announced that he was going to Holland and would be back again presently. He never asked about times or trains when he started off like this. He used to swing himself down the garden and over the fences, as if he could walk over the whole island in a day; but I found out afterwards that this was not peculiar to him, but that all Americans, when they come over to England, wander about like wild things in a cage, and crumple up distances which are severe to us into absolute nothings. I went down the garden with him; and I felt so wretched I could scarcely keep the tears out of my eyes. It seemed as if I should never see him again. He was unhappy too, I think; and when we parted, he pressed my hand till he nearly made me scream.

"I am going now for your good, my girl," he said in an undertone. "When I come back we shall know more how we stand. Good-bye; I think I know you."

All very enigmatical!—but somehow I was a little comforted by what he said; perhaps rather by what he looked; for he did look at me very kindly. Then he went; and as he turned the corner of the lane and I lost sight of him it was like the sun going out of the sky.

When I went back into the house Nora and Mr. Tagart both attacked me for going down the garden

with him; and they both ridiculed and abused him most unmercifully. I fired up in his defence, but something in Mr. Tagart's cruel face took all the blood out of mine and all the courage from my heart; so I ran away to my usual retreat, the summer-house in the garden, half-ashamed and half-frightened. I do not know what I felt—my whole being was in such confusion and distress.

Presently Guy came. Good God! had I been blind or mad? I had never thought him very handsome or manly-looking, but to-day it was as if he or I had been transformed since we met last. Small, nervous, shy, diffident, with his lank thin hair falling in a tattered, faded wisp about his bloodless face, his pale blue eyes weak and quivering, his hesitating tremulous voice, his singular, uncomfortable manner—he was too strong a contrast to the lordly cousin who had come into my life like an ideal realized and whose absence I was then lamenting.

"Dearest Ida," said poor Guy with such a painful mixture of timidity and pleasure!—"this is joy indeed, to see you again."

"How do you do, Guy?" I said as kindly as I could; but my own voice struck on myself as harsh and constrained; and I held out my hand.

"Are you glad to see me, Ida?" he asked, and he began to mumble my hand, sighing and trembling.

"Why, of course I am," I answered, trying to laugh; but the touch of his lips on my hand made my flesh creep; and I drew it hastily away. I could not bear it; it felt like sacrilege.

But he was a good soul, patient and humble and unsuspicious; and I believe he would have let me walk over him if it would have given me any pleasure.

Formerly it had been my greatest comfort to be alone with Guy. I never let him make love to me, and there had been something very soothing in his kindness; besides, I used to make him read to me, or explain what I had been reading, so that his companionship had always had something profitable and elevating in it. But now I could not bear it, it was maddening; so I got up and said: "Let us go to the house, Guy," in quite a wild way—for indeed I scarcely knew what I said or did. I only felt that I should go out of my mind if I remained there alone with him, and he treating me as if he had a *right* to be kind to me.

Underneath the little table in the summer-house lay a spray of jasmine. I remembered seeing my cousin James with it in his coat last night. Guy took it up, and in his nervous way began breaking it to pieces. I do not know what possessed me, but I do know that I shrieked out quite loudly and snatched the flower from his hand.

"My darling!" he said in a frightened tone; "I thought I had hurt you!"

I blushed, and stammered out: "It is a piece that I wanted to draw," as I thrust it into the bosom of my dress.

"I will pick you one much prettier," said poor Guy innocently; but I turned away and pretended not to hear him.

What a hypocrite I was growing! and why? I could not understand myself. Guy's coming had been like a revolution into chaos of the cheerful cosmos I had once called my soul. Oh! if only he would go away again, and my cousin James come back! How much more I cared to listen to adventures with grizzlies and wild Indians than to hear Cowper's "Sofa" or Pope's "Satires!"

Days passed: two, three, four days—a week—a fortnight—and no tidings of cousin James; not even a letter; which Nora and Mr. Tagart said was "only what might be expected from such a savage as he was." They sometimes made me almost mad by the way in which they spoke of him; but somehow I never dared to defend him—Mr. Tagart's hard, cold eyes, used to *hold* me. I had never known such misery as I was enduring now. I cried all night and I moped all day. I, who had never let myself fret in my life, who had always shaken myself free of my sorrows and smiled

and carried a brave heart and a high head through them all, now was as nerveless and hysterical as a mere miss; and the worst of it was, I did not know why I was so dreadfully unhappy. Mr. Tagart was horrible, as usual; but he was no more horrible than usual; when I came to think of it, he only seemed so. My sister Nora was no colder than she had always been; but her coldness hurt me more. Guy, poor Guy, was kinder than ever; but his kindness, which was once such a comfort, was now an absolute torture. Good heavens! how had I ever promised to be his wife! I must have been dreaming; I must have been insane; I could not marry him; I would not; I would go away to my uncle in California; I would be free, natural and happy; I would leave this narrow and conventional life for one where I might breathe; I would go away for ever and never come back to the thraldom, the shams, the tyranny of England! I had no home here —no one who cared for me—my uncle should be my father and cousin James, ah! cousin James should be my brother—and I would be his faithful friend and sister. But these two terrible years, until I come of age? What should I do! what could I do! and there was no one to help me, not even cousin James; for I could appeal to him as little as I could appeal to Guy Lawrence himself.

What any one knew or noticed of me at this time I

neither asked nor cared. I was not myself, not my own mistress. It was shame and grief to me that I had broken down so helplessly: but so it was, and I could not retrieve myself, I could not call back my lost cheerfulness, my vanished self-command. But in the midst of all this despair and agony I saw from my bedroom window—where I generally sat now straining my eyes to the south—I saw crossing the bridge that tall, commanding figure which my eyes and heart were aching to see. There he was—the slouched hat drawn close over his eyes, the velvet coat belted round his waist, the knotted stick, the air of proprietor of all he saw yet stranger to all we valued; and had he been a god, as he was my hero, he could not have been more welcome, more glorious to me. Why not? Was he not my only friend? I saw him coming with his quick movements and swift Red Indian stride across the bridge, down the little turning and along the path that skirted the meadow by the garden. I was in my own room, as I say, when I first saw him; but before he had left the bridge behind him and while he was still in the little lane, I was down by the hedge, waiting for him in the sunlight.

The wind took my hair and blew it about my head and across my face; it took my purple dress and eddied it into light gauzy clouds; it was refreshment to my parched lips and feverish cheeks; and when, as

on the first day, he crossed the meadow to the hedge, I, too, as on that first day, reached out my hands to him over the sweet-briar and flowering privet; but I could not speak, my heart was too full; I could only hold out my hands and look down; I could not look at him for more than just that one glance.

In a moment he had leaped the hedge; in a moment I felt his heart beating against mine, as he took me in his arms.

"You love me, Ida?" he said, in his full rich voice; "and as the Lord lives, I love you."

I do not need to die to know what heaven is—I knew it then.

It was all done in the open air; and the drawing-room windows looked on to the lower terrace where we stood; but I thought of nothing; I cared for nothing; I was in cousin James's keeping now and I felt that I was safe. He would let nothing harm me and no one take me from him.

Suddenly I was pulled violently, and I heard Mr. Tagart cry hoarsely: "Shameless, abandoned girl! do you dare to carry on your abominable intrigues before our very eyes?"

The next instant he was on the ground. One blow from cousin James's strong arm had laid him there.

I had been content to keep my hands clasped together and resting on my cousin's breast, but now I

threw my arms round him as far as they would go, saying: "Do not let them take me from you, cousin James! do not let them take me away!"

"They shall take my life first, I guess," said my cousin in a low, concentrated voice.

Presently Mr. Tagart picked himself up.

"You will hear of this again, sir," he said with a scowl.

"Expect I shall," said cousin James; "and you have not done with me yet."

"I have done with you so far that I forbid you to enter my house again, where I can and will keep Miss Beecham safe," said Mr. Tagart. "The law gives me that power."

"I don't care a curse for your old laws," said cousin James. "Ida is mine, and I mean to keep her."

"We shall see about that," said Mr. Tagart; then turning to me he added authoritatively, speaking as if I had been a dog: "Go into the house, do you hear? go in this instant, I say!" He put out his hand as if to take hold of me.

"Do you want to feel the earth again, you mean cuss?" cried cousin James striking down his arm; and my brother-in-law shrank back.

"You are aware of the penalty for assaulting a clergyman?" he faltered, trying to bluster but in reality very frightened.

"I neither know nor care," said cousin James; "but

if you touch her, I'll do it again. Now, Ida, my girl, you listen to me. You know after this I can't go to your house again; but I'll take lodgings in the town and look after you. I'll trust you and you'll trust me, and all will come right. And as for the coil you've got into with the man you've promised, you must tell him you have made a mistake, and that you are coming to me as my wife; and I'll tell him so, too."

"I will, cousin James," I said.

"I am sorry to disturb your pleasant little arrangement," said Mr. Tagart sneeringly; "but I am your master, Miss Beecham, till you are of age; and until then I absolutely forbid all intercourse whatsoever with your cousin James. You have engaged yourself to Mr. Lawrence; and I warn you I will use all my influence over him to hold you to your bond."

"I know Guy too well for that!" I exclaimed. "He will give me up the moment I ask him."

"For yourself perhaps he might; *I* would, if I were in his place," said my brother-in-law; "but your money may be useful. Apparently more than Guy Lawrence think so."

My cousin's bronzed cheek flamed at this insolence, and he made a stride towards Mr. Tagart, with a look on his face I did not like to see. I laid both my hands on his arms, and placed myself in his way. "Do not touch him, dear," I said imploringly; "we can afford to let him rave."

"Ida, it is hard," said my cousin, between his teeth; but he obeyed me and turned his back abruptly on my brother-in-law.

I knew it cost the quick, hot, Californian blood something to subdue itself to our tamer manners; but cousin James was too brave to be a brawler, and if he might not strike he would not condescend to wrangle; so he left Mr. Tagart to himself and took me away to the summer-house, where my brother-in-law was obliged to leave us in peace, having by this time become nervous and alarmed.

Here we made our plans; plans indeed, they were not; only that we were both to declare ourselves to Guy, and to remain faithful to each other and hopeful, until cousin James should see his way to my effectual deliverance from what we both knew would be a tyrannous bondage. And when the evening had come I tore myself away—I going into prison, while cousin James stood motionless on the terrace, watching me to the end. And when I got into the house he was standing there still; but I was in the power of my brother-in-law and guardian.

And now my trial began in real earnest. All that could be thought of to break down my love, my pride, my resolution, was put in force; but I stood firm. Guy was induced—Heaven knows by what shameful misrepresentations of my cousin!—to refuse to see me

and to maintain his claim on me. He wrote me a long letter; and I was not unjust enough not to see the real love and tenderness in it. He held me for my own good, he said, and until my madness had subsided; if, in the future, when I had grown calmer and could see things as they were, I still wished to break off my engagement, I should; but for my own sake, as matters were now, he must keep to my word. So there was no help there; and as I was kept a close prisoner in my room, denied every kind of liberty, I had nothing for it but to be patient, to rely on circumstance, to hope, and not to believe what both Nora and Mr. Tagart told me:—which was that cousin James had left Cracroft, and that no one knew where he had gone or what had become of him, and that he had probably washed his hands of the affair altogether, and returned to California, or been lost among the mountains and was now lying dead at the foot of some precipice. I did not believe either one or the other story; but it is not easy to keep up one's courage when one is in such a position as mine—an absolute prisoner and unable to hold any kind of communication with any one but one's jailer's and tormentors.

It was a wild autumn night. The rain was falling in torrents; the wind was howling through the trees; the waterfall at the back of the Vicarage roared and rushed as though it would tear the very roots of the

earth away; and I sat in the dark, in my own room, listening and waiting.

It was past midnight, and all the house had gone to bed; but I sat by the window looking out into the darkness. All I could see were the outlines of the trees and mountains, and sometimes the white sheet of seething water in the distance, by the lightning that streamed across the sky. Suddenly I heard a muffled kind of noise against the side of the house, and then a gentle tapping against the window; and I thought I saw by a vivid flash the figure of a man standing dark against the pane. I was frightened at the first, but I soon recovered myself. When you are very miserable, even danger comes as a relief. The tapping was repeated softly; and I cautiously opened the window. Light and supple as a panther there sprang into my room—something; in the darkness I did not know what or who it was. I only felt a large mass of wet velvet; then two arms that took me up from the ground bodily; and a warm bearded face that kissed mine.

"Ida!" whispered a voice. And then I knew what my heart had already told me. It was my cousin James—my beloved, my deliverer!

"Can you brave the night?" he said.

He did not ask, could I trust him? He knew that.

"With you? Yes, I could brave anything!" I answered.

"Put on your hat and cloak then, and come," said my cousin. "Never mind what you leave behind you; you shall have double all you lose."

"I have no things," I whispered. "They have taken away everything except what I am wearing. No hat no cloak, no boots!" And I tried to laugh.

My cousin swore between his teeth.

"The night will kill you," he said. "Oh, the damned cruel tigers!"

Just then a driving gust of wind and rain shook and deluged the room. The lightning flashed more vividly, the flashes were more frequent, and the thunder roared with more tremendous power. I clung to my cousin. Even I, strong-nerved as I was, shrank from the idea of facing such a storm in a thin muslin dress and with only bedroom slippers.

"You are afraid, my darling, my beauty!" he said, very tenderly.

I trembled as I clung to him; I was cold, only half-clad, and I had been for a fortnight so poorly fed that I was more than half-starved; besides, the moral anguish I had gone through had shaken me; so no wonder I trembled.

"I cannot even ask you in such weather," he went on to say, soothingly. "We must bide our time and wait for a fairer opportunity; but I have a carriage at the foot of the hill, the ship sails to-morrow and our passage is taken."

"I will go, cousin James," I said, lifting up my head. "It is only one trial and then I shall be safe."

He pressed me to him rapturously. "I thought I knew my brave girl!" he said. "One effort, Ida, and you are free!"

Quick as thought he wrapped me in his velvet coat, and buckled it round my waist so that it did not inconvenience me; then he stepped out into the darkness, holding my hand and softly telling me not to fear. I followed him and groped my way on to the ladder that was placed against the window; and in a few seconds I was on the gravel walk—slipperless! But I did not tell him this. We felt our way in the dark through the garden to the gate by the summer-house, where, at the foot of the hill, the carriage was waiting. Turning back to look at the Vicarage for the last time, I thought I saw a small red flame flicker out of one of the windows. I looked again, and saw it more distinctly. Another and another; then came the smell of burning wood; then the hissing of the rain as it fell on the rapidly increasing flames, while wreaths of red smoke wound up into the air and were lost in the blackness of the night. There was no doubt now; the house was on fire.

"We must go back and save the poor cusses," said cousin James quietly. "My darling! we will not be parted even for this."

He kissed me, and rushed back to the house just as the flames were licking up to the floor of my sister's bedroom; and I saw him disappear into the smoke and fire. I could not stay where I was. Like a wild thing I too rushed up to the house, but the heat drove me back. I called to my cousin. Above the din and tumult of the fire and the night, my voice, flung up with the shrill sharpness of agony, reached his ear. He was then carrying down the insensible form of my sister, Mr. Tagart clinging to him, crying; and as soon as he had placed them in safety he came back to me, saying cheerily: "Here I am, Ida! not a darned hair the worse!"

He did everything so coolly, so much as a matter of course!—but though he said he was no worse, there was a great gash in his strong arm, and the blood was streaming from it.

"Tie it up, my beauty," he said to me pleasantly as if it were a mere scratch; "let me see if you are fit to be a Californian's wife."

And when I had tied up the wound, which I did as bravely as I could—for I knew that would please him more than sympathetic tremors and tears—he kissed me again, and said with such love in his voice that my very brain reeled for joy: "God bless you, girl! I thought you were clear grit all through, and now I know it."

Oh, you great heavens, how I loved him at that moment!

By this time the fire had become seen from the town, and the place was alive. But cousin James, having done all that he cared to do—saved Nora and Mr. Tagart, and assured himself that the servants were safe—took me aside, and in the confusion we were lost and made our escape without attracting notice. The next day we embarked on board the boat bound for California, and a clergymen on board married us. And as he read the service I looked up with a strange sensation, and—do not think me absolutely insane?—I declare to you, on my word of honour and as I hope to be saved, I saw Guy Lawrence, beautiful as a glorified angel, and as if floating in mid-air, gazing down on me with a tender but well-pleased smile. As I looked, the vision faded away; but I saw him as distinctly as I see you now, and I knew in my heart that he was dead.

And so he was. When we got to California we found a telegram to arrest my cousin and me on a charge of arson and manslaughter; though I don't know how they made that out exactly. But it seems that poor Guy, hurrying to the burning house and not able to find any tidings of me, dashed headlong into the flames, calling out my name, and—I cannot end the sentence! Poor Guy! poor loving, faithful Guy! I wonder if I *am* a wretch, as Mr. Tagart says.

It was a poor kind of reward however, to my hero for his bravery in saving my sister and her husband from such an awful death, to be arrested the moment he set foot on his native land. But California is not quite like England, and cousin James made it right somehow with the Consul and the Judge; and to make assurance doubly sure, he took me away the next day to a solitary ravine among the mountains, where no one could find us, and where we lived absolutely in the wilderness till everything had blown over and I was my own mistress and of age. Up to that time Mr. Tagart did not cease to persecute me; but we were too far off to be touched; and when cousin James told our story, the popular feeling went so entirely with us that it would have been more than a man's life was worth to have attempted to molest us.

So here I am, at last LIVING—free, blessed, and beloved; and though sometimes my heart turns back to dear old England with love and yearning, I have only to look at my Hero—only to take my boy, and his, to my heart, and I forget then everything but that I am cousin James's wife and the happiest mother in the whole of this bright, beautiful, grand New World!

A MYSTERY.

A MYSTERY.

I.

Though she was a widow, and might therefore be supposed to have a little experience of life, she was as ignorant as a child and almost as helpless. While yet in the schoolroom, before her skirts were lengthened or her hair turned up, she had run off with a young fellow who had just matriculated at Cambridge, and who ought to have been devoted to the Greek aorist and the mysteries of *x* rather than to the responsibilities of premature matrimony and the private education of pretty girls still under home tuition. For herself too, a skipping-rope or a big wax doll would have been more to the purpose as a plaything than a live husband of eighteen; and it seemed a farce to call such a baby-faced little girl by the majestic name of Mistress—Mrs. Harold Lawrence Arthur. She was just "Miss Moira" still—no more—to the old servants at home; and Nurse flatly refused to call her by her new name when she spoke of her to her stepmother, Mrs. Gilbanks, as sometimes she was obliged to do.

The marriage did not last long. Harold was drowned in the Cam in less than six months after that foolish elopement; and Moira found herself at seventeen a widow, without a friend or a penny. The young people had quarrelled with their respective families, or rather their families had quarrelled with them, on account of that wild marriage which was equally disastrous for both; and as no child was born of the union, the Arthurs did not think themselves bound to make any provision for the widow of the eldest son who had deceived them, and was still three years under age when he died.

Moira's stepmother, Mrs. Gillbanks—she had no father—had four daughters of her own for whom some day she would have to find husbands; and, perhaps with natural maternal selfishness, thinking that the presence of the pretty young widow at home would be both a hindrance and a bad example, she assumed the tone of outraged virtue and consequently implacable resentment, and declined to receive even a letter from this bad girl who had eloped in the early morning and got married by stealth before the family knew that she had gone beyond the garden bounds.

Hence the child—for indeed she was nothing but a child even now; such a pathetic little object in her widow's weeds!—was left to sink or swim as she best could. And had it not been for the exertions of old

Mr. Loader, the family solicitor and her father's trusted confidant, she would have sunk to a dead certainty; and pretty deep too. But he stood her friend, as much as an old bachelor close on seventy can stand the friend of a pretty creature of seventeen who has been discarded by her family, and in some degree disgraced by an indiscretion. At all events, he helped her to get her own living, so far as he could; but his efforts were parlously like those of Sisyphus; and the golden fountain shining in the distance continually turned out to be nothing more than a mirage, resolving itself into empty air and barren sand when they got up to it.

Whatever she undertook fell through; and she was always returning on Mr. Loader's hands, as pretty and pathetic, as hungry and as hopeless, as before. If she got a situation as a governess, she was sure to be dismissed at the end of the quarter; and it was with the greatest difficulty that she arrived even to the dignity of being engaged at all. She was too pretty for the average British matron to suffer within her four walls; husbands are only flesh and blood when all is said—adolescent sons are frailer than cracked china—and she was too young for the satisfactory management of children. Her story too, would not bear close investigation; and when she said that she was a widow, the natural question was: Why did not her friends support her?

She tried literature—that jauntily assumed profession of all the impecunious who cannot write decent English and have no idea of literary composition; but even courteous editors and gallant publishers cannot accept trash for the sake of a wild-flower face and a pair of big blue eyes; and her literary efforts were something like her educational—successive stepping-stones to blank disappointment. She never took higher rank in the world of letters than that of a copyist at so much per folio; and though she did her work here with zeal and industry, poor little soul! she did it with such a very scant amount of intelligence, and such very odd ideas of orthography, that she was found of no more value as a transcriber than she had been as an original composer; and her folios soon ceased to bring her in their covenanted pence, or to cause confusion and dismay to their readers.

Then she went on the stage; but she was as unsuccessful an actress as she had been an authoress. The manager, not to wound her feelings, said she was too good for her parts—failures always are too good for their parts; and that she was too much the real lady to represent one according to conventional rules. She herself said the other actresses were jealous of her—established success always is jealous of failure; and her acting followed in the wake of all the rest.

In short, it was the old story—youth, beauty, sweet-

ness, but no available faculties of which bread can be made in a world where workers are many and loaves are few.

At last, as a kind of forlorn hope, Mr. Loader, her friend and solicitor in one, advanced her a sum of money and established her as the mistress of a private boarding-house; with a certain Mrs. Martin, a woman of about forty, to be coadjutor, housekeeper and chaperon. It was rather a dangerous experiment, all things considered; but something must be done;—and this was better than hanging about the stage where she could not get an engagement, writing novels that no one would print, or going out as a governess to leave in a whirlwind at the end of the first quarter. Mrs. Martin was a respectable woman, who would look to the business part of the arrangements while young Mrs. Arthur would attend to the ornamental; the one making out the bills, the other playing accompaniments and dispensing smiles; and between the two the men at least would be made to pay handsomely, and to hold their expenses more than counterbalanced by their privileges.

The venture succeeded. The house filled; the guests were satisfied; and the thing went on castors. At last then, the hitch in the young widow's affairs seemed to have been satisfactorily got over, and Mr. Loader congratulated himself on his foresight and

wisdom. The poor child, as he called her, was well provided for in the present and would probably make a good marriage before many years were out. She had a respectable home and a fair position of the second-rate kind; and her shares in the lottery of a rather scrubby fortune, at the best, were decidedly at par.

So the winter passed; and when the spring came it found Moira and Mrs. Martin with a full house at Crane Square and a good paying connexion all round.

It was on the fifteenth of April when Moira went to Mr. Loader's office to report progress and pay money. The quarter's interest on his loan was due; and it was part of her pride to pay it on the exact day, before twelve o'clock had struck. She brought also a small portion of the principal; which was evidence enough that things were satisfactory. On Mr. Loader's asking her how she was getting on, she answered with her sunny smile:

"Splendidly!" and then added laughing: "We are really getting quite aristocratic! To-morrow we have our first title—the Count Borgoncini. He has taken the best room—the room which the Smiths had—and talks of staying into the summer. So you see we are looking up in good earnest!"

"Is he an Italian?" asked Mr. Loader suspiciously.

"It is an Italian name, is it not? But he speaks as good English as we do," she answered.

"I don't like that so well," half grumbled the old lawyer.

"Perhaps his mother was English," she suggested.

"That does not mend matters, my dear. Mongrels are proverbially bad; nomadic mongrels above all. What is he like?"

Moira smiled.

"Very handsome," she said with a certain silly little look of girlish consciousness, not unbecoming but not reassuring. "He is tall and dark and slender, like a hero of romance. He puts me in mind of Byron's Corsair."

"I am sorry," said Mr. Loader gravely. "Who recommended him?"

"A friend of Mrs. Martin's."

"Any references?"

"Yes; to a banker and a lawyer." She named each.

"You have made inquiries?"

"Yes."

"And what do they say."

"Both say that he has money, and that he has been recommended to them by their correspondents abroad. Oh! it is all right, Mr. Loader."

"I hope it is, my dear; but we old lawyers are suspicious. We see so much rascality in the world!—and we know the possibility of wolves masquerading in sheep's clothing," he said, still very grave and doubtful.

"No, he is not a wolf!" she cried, laughing and blushing. "At least, I think not. He is very nice however, whether he is a lion or a lamb."

"I will see him," said Mr. Loader. "When does he go to you?"

"To-morrow."

"To-morrow then, give me a place at your table and let me inspect your new arrival."

"Willingly," she said, shaking hands with him cordially. "How kind it is of you to take so much interest in me!"

"Not at all! I think of you as a kind of child of my own now, and hold myself bound to look after you," he answered pleasantly.

And with this the interview ended. But Moira felt that the old lawyer had now accepted the responsibility of the matter, and that the establishment of Count Borgoncini's respectability was his affair, not hers.

II.

Born to fascinate. There was nothing else to be said and no more lucid explanation to be given. The charm was there, patent to all eyes; but the why was not so clear. Other men were as handsome, as well-mannered, as graceful; other men had travelled as much, and

could discourse as eloquently of Venice and St. Petersburg, Copenhagen and Palermo; other men had as sweet a voice and as extended a register; many had franker eyes if few more beautiful; many a more easily-read face if few a sweeter smile or a more caressing manner: but none had so much power of fascination, none so irresistible a charm.

What was it, this nameless spell which made all the women in love with Cristoforo Borgoncini, and compelled even the men to consider him a pleasant fellow and wonder where the deuce he got it from? Even young Mountstuart, who, as Mrs. Arthur's cavalier-in-chief, might have been pardoned a little jealousy of this handsome interloper, even he yielded to the charm with the rest, and before three days were come and gone was Count Borgoncini's sworn friend. And Mr. Loader was as plastic as the rest—as plastic as if the credulity of his youth had never been hardened by the experience of his age, and the special value of the detective police had not been made manifest to him in his career.

But indeed, there was no reason why Cristoforo, Count Borgoncini, should not be trusted. No one could have a more simple or straightforward history; and it is really too absurd, as well as too unjust, to suspect a man of infamous possibilities when he does not offer a doubtful point even in appearance. All that Bor-

goncini told of himself—and he spoke as freely of his affairs as a new schoolboy—was utterly commonplace; there was no room for distrust because there was no assumption of romance. As Moira had suggested, he was the son of an English mother and a Roman father; whereby his perfect English was accounted for and his Italian made respectable. He had lost both parents when young, and was now on his travels, as so many times before; having, as he said, the true Englishman's roving propensities. He was fairly rich, he said, for a man in his position; but by no means a second Monte Cristo. He had an ancestral palace in Rome, and a house and villa at Cività Vecchia; and that five thousand pounds, unquestionably lying now at the banker's here in London, was just a year's revenue out of the golden nugget bearing interest for him at the National Bank in Rome.

He never boasted, however. He let these little facts about himself fall quite simply and naturally, without swagger or vainglory. People who are what they represent themselves to be never do boast. The thing fits too closely to be made a show of, and the title which you inherit you do not flourish like a red rag in the face of your neighbours; that which you buy with a price you proclaim with a fanfare of trumpets as noisily as Dr. Dulcamara proclaimed his nostrums.

One day however, the Count did say something to

Mountstuart of a rather more intimate character. If the Englishman had been ill-natured he might have said it was a blind, or a false scent trailed across his path; but Borgoncini was too good a fellow for that, and he spoke too simply to be doubted.

"I dare say you have often wondered why a man of my means and position should have chosen a boarding-house for his pied-à-terre?" he said. "Well, caro mio, this is my whim and my secret. I want to study the middle classes of my mother's country; and to study them au fond—ergründlich, as we say in Germany—with a view to future literary work. I am engaged on a gigantic book of Social Comparisons, and I must go through foreign society vertically. My own set is the same everywhere; and through my mother I know high-class English country life to the very hot-water cans brought into your room at night. I am sick of the dead level of civilization, the monotony of aristocratic sybaritism. What I want is freshness; the couleur locale strong and clear; refinement, of course, but individuality as well. Hence I came to pretty Mrs. Arthur's:—and I do not regret my choice."

"It is the pleasantest house of the kind to be found in all London," said Mountstuart warmly.

Borgoncini smiled rather affectedly.

"It is perfect," he said slowly. "So is the fair padrona."

He looked up from under his long arched brows as he said this, watching his companion keenly. Mountstuart changed colour. He had the sensitive skin of a fair-complexioned Englishman, and his blood was easily moved. In contrast to this sudden flush Borgoncini's pale face grew paler still, and he involuntarily set his teeth. If English on the one side, he was Italian on the other; and the daring and energy of the one nation were matched by the furious jealousies and headlong passions of the other. And such as he was, with all his gifts of person and fortune, it was scarcely to be wondered at if he disliked rivalry even more than the average man dislikes it; or if, when he had marked out the ground for his own sport, he resented trespassing. And it was getting clear to all in the house that he was marking off the ground round about the pretty widow, and that the first act of this Anglo-Italian drama had only just begun.

Too poor to make her the profitable prey of an adventurer, too beautiful not to be loved for herself by the highest as well as by men of her own natural social standing, this evident admiration of the rich young Roman noble for the charming mistress of the house surprised no one in Crane Square. What though the Roman nobility is notoriously the proudest in the world, and the Roman ladies the most exclusive?—By his own showing Count Borgoncini had no ladies in his

family to repudiate any parvenue wife whatsoever whom he might elect to introduce; and for himself, her sweetness and loveliness would be his ample apology to the men of his own order. There was nothing so extraordinary in it, after all, when you came to analyze the matter. Caste is unquestionably a terribly strong martingale; but love and human nature are stronger. And so Borgoncini found them. He fell desperately and sincerely in love with Moira; and she fell as desperately and as sincerely in love with him. It was an idyl of the purest kind; and the most intense interest was excited in the household watching it from its beginning.

By this time the memory of her first husband had faded into a vague and tender dream with Moira, and she felt as free to love the handsome Count as if she had never been the wife of an adoring Esquire. On all sides it was a lift for her such as in her boldest flights of fancy she had never dared to hope. He was the real fairy prince breaking through the tangled thicket and setting the sealed fountains of love, happiness and prosperity once more flowing. Young, rich, handsome, noble and unselfishly in love, what could she have to make her more blessed? what jewel was wanting to her crown? When Cristoforo asked her to be his wife on that moonlight night, when the two stood out on the balcony together, she felt as if the very heavens

had opened and angels had taken her up to glory—as if all that she had suffered of sorrow and poverty, of perplexity and disappointment, were a mere sough of the wind among the trees compared to the delight of what she had gained. She would have gone through twice and thrice as much to have heard those dear words: "I love you"—to have felt those strong arms round her, and her head drawn to his breast, where she was to find for evermore her home and resting-place.

And how he loved her! While speaking to her his whole frame trembled like a girl's; and when he kissed her one large burning tear fell on her face.

"Troppo tardi! troppo tardi!" he said below his breath; but Moira was too deeply moved for her own part to heed a few half-sobbing broken words; and after this outburst Cristoforo recovered himself with an effort, and smiled as he turned the sweet face to the moonlight, murmuring with all an Italian's caressing passion: "Io t' amo, io t' amo!"

The sweet secret was not kept between the two so well that no one else came upon its traces, and significant looks and whispers made the young lovers aware that the household in Crane Square had divined the truth. Moira was too proud to wish to conceal the thing and too happy in her love to care whether it were known or not; but the Count was more reserved and less expansive. It was in his way to be secret, if

he were a true Italian; and he one day said to Moira that publicity in love offended his sense of delicacy and galled him more than he cared to own. He would like to carry her away, he said; far away from all these intrusive on-lookers—from every place and person that she had ever known. He would like to live in some far-off island in the Pacific—that favourite paradise of lovers—where they might live and love unseen of aught but God, angels and sympathizing spirits.

"Would this be enough for you, Moira?" he asked, a strange look in his dark eyes—a look that was a mixture of fear and tenderness, of command and pleading.

"Yes," she said caressingly. "Quite enough. The desert would be heaven with you, Cristoforo."

"Let us go, then," he said with so much passionate pleading in his voice as to make her shrink back startled. "Let us go now, at once, far, far away! I have money. Do not let us wait for these useless and oppressive forms. We are married already by our love—a higher law than any framed by man. Let us go!"

"Cristoforo, what an idea!" cried Moira shocked. "What are you saying? what are you asking me to do? What would cost me your love, my darling, if I consented, because it would lose me your respect!"

"No," he said. "It would be my salvation and your

happiness. Dearest, best-beloved, you know how much I love you! You are going to trust yourself to me for life; trust me then, in this. Let us leave England to-morrow, and tell no one where we go or when."

"As your wife, yes," she said gently; "but not else."

"You are my wife now!" he exclaimed, holding her to him. But she quietly freed herself, and, looking into his face, answered back with full meaning:

"Your lover—the woman who loves you—but not your wife."

"O these cold English respectabilities! To-morrow, always to-morrow; and those hideous forms to be gone through!" cried the Count in a voice of violent emotion.

"But if we left in that odd secret way, they would say there was something to be ashamed of, Cristoforo," she answered. "There is nothing that all the world may not know in my life, so the blame and suspicion would fall on you; and I could not bear this. My prince, my hero, you must be honoured by the whole world; there must not be a breath against you!"

"But what could they say, Moira mia?" he insisted. "Calumny itself could invent no spectre of shame on my path!"

He looked at her with his keen eyes that seemed to read her very soul.

"They would say that you were not what you give

yourself out to be," she answered with frank simplicity.

He laughed.

"Let them!" he cried with contempt. "Who reeks what a set of drivelling idiots may like to say?"

"I could not hear you maligned by my friends," returned Moira gravely. "And after all, why should we not be married like every one else? It is so much better."

He put his hand to his forehead.

"Too late!" he said, in a voice of anguish.

She turned, and threw her arms round him.

"What is too late, Cristoforo?" she asked, his anguish repeated in her fear.

He seemed to wake up as from a dream, and looked a little wildly about him.

"Did I say too late?" he asked, with a forced laugh. "It was nothing. Niente, mia bella, niente! Don't dim those sweet eyes with tears. Nothing is too late; and our love is only just beginning."

III.

The marriage between the two young people could scarcely be called hurried on in a doubtful or undignified way; but it was certainly not delayed for needless ceremony or pompous preparation. There was

no reason why it should be delayed. Moira was of full age; there was no reluctant consent of friends or guardians to obtain; no lengthy inquisition to be made. Mr. Loader was satisfied, so was Mrs. Martin—who, indeed, told Moira twenty times a day that she was to be envied her good luck, and if she was wise she would make sure of it without waiting for bad chances. There were also no settlements to draw up; no tedious lawyers to curse now for their pedantry of distrust and to bless hereafter for their prudence. Even Mr. Loader could scarcely demand better terms for his young friend than those which the Count himself voluntarily offered, but which Moira refused—namely, to hand over to her for her own present use that unbroken sum of five thousand pounds, and make a more permanent provision when he should get back to Rome and the golden nugget fructifying in the Italian Bank.

There was absolutely no reason for delay anywhere, save in Moira's own request for time to get together that inevitable trousseau. But Cristoforo had always the answer of the impatient lover.

"I marry you, not your gowns. Come as you are, and get what you want afterwards. There is plenty of money; but time is limited, and each day's delay is a needless torture and a needless loss."

So said Mr. Loader and Mrs. Martin, the two who were nearest to her; and so said Moira's own heart.

The only person who was less than enthusiastic about the whole affair, and who besought Mrs. Arthur to pause a while before irrevocably committing herself, was James Mountstuart. He was in love with the beautiful young widow himself—had been for the last eight months; and though it was that kind of lagging loving which does not come to the point for years, if ever, and contents itself with what it has in the present and leaving the rest for by-and-by, still he did not like to see every chance of that problematical by-and-by destroyed; and when he found that Count Borgoncini was to be more than a temporary lodger, he thought it was only his duty to doubt—and, doubting, to inquire.

He set to work to find out all there was to know of this handsome young Roman noble; but he could find nothing that was detrimental or insecure. There was a Count Borgoncini in Rome; and he had a palace there and a villa at Cività Vecchia; and he was young and rich and handsome and a great traveller and without parents. In every particular the description tallied to a hair with all that Cristoforo had said of himself, and with what he was. So that the Englishman's doubts seemed somewhat gratuitous, and more the surly suspicions of jealousy than the wise precaution of prudence.

Things therefore went on unhindered and the wedding-day was fixed, when the question of the wedding-

tour was discussed between the young people. Failing that Eden in the Pacific, Cristoforo resolved to make shift for the present with England, and in a short time to go to the United States. When he asked Moira if she would like to hide away among the lakes and mountains, say of Cumberland, she had no other answer than a happy laugh. What did it signify to her where she went, provided always she was his wife and with him? She cared for no one and nothing in the world in comparison with him. The only real friends she had were Mr. Loader and Mrs. Martin—and she liked them well enough. The one had stood by her in her dark days and the other had done her best to make her venture successful:—and had she not been the cause of *his* coming to her house?—and she should never forget or be less than grateful to them. But for all that they were nothing when placed side by side with him; and for the rest, the whole race might go into oblivion so long only as he was left. She cared only to be *his* wife—*his* companion.

Imagine all this said by a beautiful caressing woman to a man of ardent blood, madly in love and not naturally inclined to self-control. What wonder if he lost all consideration for his Order and the pomp due to his rank, and got the marriage ceremony hurried over at the Registrar's with the least publicity and at the greatest speed possible?

It was only another proof of his love, he said; he did not want to lose precious time in useless ceremonial. And Moira, to whom himself was everything and his rank and title and wealth only adventitious graces, agreed to this unromantic method, as it was his wish; and without bridal-veil or orange-blossoms on her side, without papers or verification on his, without bridal parade of any kind, they made their joint declaration in due form, and set off for the Lakes from the door of the Registrar's office—the carriage standing there already packed.

When they arrived at the railway-station, Borgoncini took out of his pocket-book two or three labels with "Mr. Smith, passenger, Coniston," written on them. He had asked Moira not to label her trunk before starting. He had so much dislike to all kinds of publicity, and he would so much rather that their retreat for the honeymoon should remain a secret between them alone!

"That will be better," said Moira half shyly. "I am so glad no one will know where we are."

"Did you see, my darling," he said, when they were alone in the railway-carriage, whirling from Euston to Elysium, "that I have dropped my title and changed my name? I want to be lost for a little while; to be alone in the world with you; not to be stared at for my foreign name, nor to be oppressed by English ser-

vility for my title. I want to be yours only—to be nobody to all others but to you—to be your secret, your beloved!"

"My beloved! yes, more than beloved!" said Moira, flinging herself into his arms, feeling that to be thus lost to the world and known only to each other was the very finishing touch of her joy.

In the mood in which the lovers were, the more simple the life the greater the charm. Anything which isolated and shut them off from their past and the world at large was so much added to their delight. To be alone there in that beautiful country—alone with love and Nature; to play at semi-poverty and an almost meagre rusticity—he no longer a proud Roman noble, she no Contessa in an old historical family, but plain undistinguished Mr. and Mrs. Smith; to forget the princely palace and the luxurious villa, and niche themselves in the humblest little rooms of the humblest little peasant farmhouse at the entrance to a lonely dale, where the shadows of Wetherlam and Crinkle Crags seemed like magic webs that wrapped them round and hid them from the prying eyes of men; to live on frugal peasant fare, and to pretend that money was scarce, and that their small store would soon come to an end—that five thousand being tabooed,—how delightful it all was! What a divine dream! What a cloudless day stolen out of heaven!

It was perfect throughout. She had no doubt nor care, and he seemed to have no regret and no misgiving. Sometimes, to be sure, he used to lose himself in reveries; but he shook them off at a word, a touch, from her; when he would clasp her to him with almost feverish haste, and look into her face murmuring something that said how much he loved her and how she was his own—his very own—whom no one could take from him. Whatever happened, she was his.

This exquisite idyl went on for a full fortnight, and no interruption had come. Moira had not written to Crane Square, nor yet to Mr. Loader, nor had Cristoforo to his banker's. No one knew where they were; and their security from intrusion by the post was one of the pleasantest things in the whole delightful arrangement. One daily London newspaper alone represented their whole connexion with the outside world; and even this, though Cristoforo read it with eagerness, or rather scanned certain parts with eagerness, Moira never read. She preferred looking at the mountains, she said, or listening to her husband's voice—now when he sang snatches of operatic songs, and now, which was even sweeter and more musical, when he told her how much he loved her and how her beauty was to him as glorious as the beauty of a goddess.

Opening the paper one day and turning to the second column of the first page, as he always did, Cris-

toforo slightly started and turned pale. His young wife's adoring eyes were fixed on him, as they ever were, worshipping and studying the face which made all her sunshine, all her joy.

"What is it, darling?" she asked.

"Nothing, carina. What is what?" he answered, with a forced air of playfulness.

"I thought you looked disturbed, as if you had seen something in the paper that had distressed you," she said lovingly.

"I? Sweet little Lady Fanciful, nothing!" he answered.

"You know I must share all your sorrows and anxieties," returned Moira, clasping her arms round his neck and drawing his head to her breast as she stood by him, he sitting in the shabby armchair which was the one luxury of the room, his face turned up to her.

"When I have them," he answered. "My Moira, will you indeed be brave enough to bear sorrow for my sake?"

"Yes; I would die for you," she answered fervently.

"All kinds of suffering, sweetheart?"

"All kinds possible to you," she answered. "I should never have the sorrow of shame; that I could not bear: but all the rest."

"Blessed Moira, you will not have to bear sorrow or

shame for me! I am safe," he said hurriedly; and yet his manner was constrained even while fervent.

"I know that; of course you are," she smiled back in answer. "I should not love you as much if you were not so good, so noble, so perfect."

He too smiled at this; but his face was white to ghastliness, as he said:

"No, no; not so good as this, Moira. But you must love me whatever befalls. Promise this. Whatever may come to me, or to you through me, love me, love me always!"

She bent her head and kissed him.

"When I no longer love you I shall die," she answered in a low voice.

"Ah, there spoke the true woman!" he cried with extreme agitation; and then, as if overpowered by nervous excitement, he turned his face to her bosom and burst into a storm of tears.

He was an Italian after all; and tears come naturally to the descendants of the Gracchi and the representatives of the conquerors of the world.

But the storm passed as quickly as it had burst forth, and the sunshine of their love broke out anew. Cristoforo apologized for his "extraordinary breakdown;" but he said he realized so vividly the horror of Moira's ceasing to love him, that he was overpowered with his own self-made pain. It was weak and boyish; but the

Italian blood was like that; and the men were no less brave or true because they would weep like women when they were stirred, or dreaded the cessation of the beloved's love.

After this they went out into the long green pastures of the dale, and Cristoforo crushed the newspaper into his pocket under pretence of reading it when they were out. But when Moira had left the room to put on her hat, he carefully tore out from among the advertisements one in Italian, headed "Franz to Cristoforo." It was a short advertisement, in some sense simple, in another mysterious. "Where are you?" it said. "Why is the business neglected? Send your address to the Head at once, or the Brethren will seek you out! Remember! Fidelity or Death!"

So the dream had passed, and the waking time was at hand! He had forgotten himself and dared to be virtuous and free; and now came the Avenger to call him back to his bondage. Too late, too late! the purification of love had come too late! Years ago he had yielded himself a willing thrall to those who were now his masters, and his own desire could not break the bond. His only hope lay in the obscurity of their present mode of life; in his changed name; in the careful obliteration of all traces by which he might be tracked and hunted down. But at best this state of things could not last long; yet, with the unreasoning

hope of fear, he trusted to the chances of a miracle and the distancing of Nemesis.

IV.

Nothing could be more splendid than the day. If the general climate of the Lake country is one of the worst in the world, the occasional breaks of brightness are the most beautiful. Then the place is transformed, and the most familiar points take new aspects and assume fresh loveliness. Nowhere does the blood bound with more rapturous joy than when in the sunshine among the mountains; nowhere do troubles so suddenly become light, hope so buoyant, happiness so intense; and Cristoforo and Moira both felt what all of us who have lived there know by heart—the nameless flavour, the intoxication of this glorious beauty when touched by the magic of a splendid sky.

The young lovers agreed to utilize the rare grace of such weather as this, and to spend the whole day among the mountains. They took with them the "bread-and-cheese" to supplement the "kisses," which formed the staple of their personal nourishment; and light-hearted, beautiful, loving and young, they went up the Miners' Path, and so on to the higher peaks of the Coniston range and Wetherlam.

How enchanting it all was! Turn where they would, they saw nothing but loveliness and felt nothing but love. They spent the whole day out beneath the sky; when the sun shone too fiercely, lying under the shadow of the great grey lichen-covered rocks; if they were thirsty, drinking of the clear small running rills, those mountain ghylls which in summer are mere silver threads and in winter formidable torrents; couching on the elastic heather, watching the wild birds soaring overhead; gathering the moss and flowers as a wreath for his hat, a chain for her neck; laughing like happy children, loving like children, content with the present and not looking to the future, divinely blessed in the moments as they came and went.

It was a day to be taken as poets take their hours of inspiration—as a temporary admission into a higher state of spiritual beauty and exaltation than that which man can bear for a long stretch of time. It was too intense, too exquisite to last; but while it lasted, those two sitting there hand in hand on the mountain-side, lost to all but Nature and their love, knew the secret which created paradise and imagined heaven.

Only when the shadows began to lengthen, and the silver moon rose up in the east as the sun was slowly sinking in a sea of gold in the west, only then did they think of returning home. For indeed that humble little cottage was their home, and the happiest they could have known.

As they came slowly down the mountain-side and into the long green narrow dale they came down into night. Shut in between those lofty mountain-walls, neither sun nor moon shone into the deepening darkness. It was as if their fairyland of glory and delight had suddenly dissolved into thin air and left only the dull clay-bound earth with its gloom and tears.

Moira shuddered with the chill of the changed air; and Cristoforo shuddered too—he scarcely knew why. They were strangely silent as they walked down the valley, clinging hand in hand with a tighter but less tranquil grasp. The glory, the exaltation, of the day had gone, and they were face to face with darkness and reality.

"It is like walking among graves," half whispered Moira, more to herself than to her husband.

He started when she spoke, and turned to her with a strange look.

"Would you live among the graves with me?" he said, that loving impatience for loving assurance breaking out afresh, as so often before.

"Rather with you in a dungeon than without you on a throne," she answered tenderly. "A dungeon would be a throne if you were there."

"God forgive me!" said Cristoforo below his breath. "This is the worst of all my crimes!"

But she heard nothing, suspected nothing; only

knew that he took her in his arms and kissed her face which the very intensity of her love had made sad rather than joyous. Then he smiled, but sadly too, for his own part; yet he answered back in a lighter manner that somehow seemed forced and unnatural: "Ah, when that dungeon opens for us!" as if such a contingency were morally impossible in their well-formed, well-ordered lives.

Then they went on, once more sunk in silence, till they came to their own safe little home at the entrance of the dale, standing in the light of the now fairly-risen moon.

Leaning against the rude palisading that fenced in the small garden lounged a dark gipsy-looking man smoking. His broad-leaved hat was pulled far over his brows; but his gleaming eyes shone out bright as stars from beneath the brim. He was tall, sinewy, picturesque; his long dark hair fell in wavy curls into his neck; his dress was rakish and not English; and his whole manner and appearance had that indescribable air of the reckless handsome daredevil with whom no law was binding, no woman sacred, no man secure. He was a man for whom Fourier would have been hard put to it to find a noble use, or the most passionate humanitarian a more fitting ending than the gallows. He was one destined to be the scourge of his generation; a man who would undertake the worst crimes and most

shameful villanies of a secret sect or a powerful lord; yet one whose fidelity was only to be counted on when he had committed himself so deeply that, if he betrayed his trust, he would be hanged by the law or shot by his comrades without it. He was a man to make even the woman who loved him tremble; and who, like the Cossacks and the Croats, would have laughed as he tossed up the child on his pike before the eyes of the mother. He was a man in whom the conscience and the affections were alike dead, and whose only claim to respect was in his courage and his intelligence.

As the two came out of the darkness into the moonlight, he, lounging against the fence, drew himself up and made a few steps forward to meet them. He took off his wide sombrero to Moira; then said in good English, but with a strong foreign accent:

"Ah, Cristoforo! Good evening, my friend! You scarcely expected to find me here in your lovely little nest, I fancy? I have had some trouble in coming on it. Dame! you have doubled cleverly!"

Count Borgoncini, proud Roman noble as he was, made no sign of dissatisfaction with this abrupt address, familiar in form and insolent in manner as it was. Neither did he show any surprise at seeing the man lounging there like one accustomed to the place from childhood, though Moira started and clung to her husband with sudden terror. He took the whole thing

with a strangely patient and weary kind of air, as if it were something he had been expecting—dreading, if you will—but the coming of which created no surprise and was even rather the relief of certainty as against the terror of suspense.

"Good evening, Franz," he said listlessly.

The man smiled beneath his long moustache.

"There is no fight in him," he said to himself. "He has thrown up the sponge already."

Cristoforo opened the little gate, and, still holding Moira's hand in his, went up the garden-path. The man whom he called Franz followed them uninvited, but as confident as if he had been welcomed. When they were in the room, with the candles lighted on the table, Franz turned his glittering eyes on Moira.

"Present me to your bride, Cristo," he said jauntily. "Looking at her, I understand it all."

Not white so much as a dull, dead, ashen-grey, like a man who has already begun to die, Borgoncini turned to his wife, but did not look at her.

"My friend," he said curtly.

'Franz," added the new-comer.

"Franz," repeated the Count.

Moira, frightened and distressed, she scarcely knew why, bowed with a constrained air to this bold dark-eyed stranger; but he, with a little laugh, held out his hand, saying:

"The English fashion is best, madame. Let me shake hands with my dear friend's lovely wife."

Borgoncini set his teeth and made a sudden movement, almost as if he would have struck his friend; but Franz turned his eyes full on him with a look before which the Roman noble visibly quailed.

"You were never selfish, Cristo mio," he said. "And no man knows better than you the laws and privileges of—Brotherhood. 'Egalité et Fraternité,' that is a grand motto, is it not, madame? Ah! I see you approve. That is the motto which your husband and I have sworn one to the other—non è vero, caro mio?" significantly to Borgoncini. "Answer!" imperatively.

"In certain circumstances, yes," he answered sullenly.

"In all!" repeated Franz, with emphasis.

Soon after this Moira went into her own room, and the two men were left alone. Then the mask fell off, and the miserable truth showed itself.

Borgoncini went up to his friend.

"Black-hearted devil!" he said. "What prevents my taking your throat in my two hands and strangling the life out of you now at this moment?"

Franz laughed; but as he laughed he showed the muzzle of a small revolver.

"Well! this does, for one thing," he said; "and a

care for your own precious neck, for another. But what a fool you are to take that tone with me, Cristo! We are not acting a melodrama, mon cher. It is a very simple matter of business that we have together. Come, sit down, and let us talk over it rationally. You are not going to strangle me; and you have your accounts to render. So, cominciamo; a little farther off, please. I should be sorry to be under the necessity of shooting you—prematurely."

Livid with rage, almost crazed with the madness of his present humiliation, hunted down, trapped, at his enemy's mercy, Borgoncini took the place indicated and buried his face on his crossed arms. The Nemesis whom he had thought to distance had come up with him, and his sin had indeed found him out.

"Now to business," began Franz, settling himself comfortably. "You have acted out a very pretty little poem; and I grant you the temptation was strong. She is fit for the fancy of even a rover like you, with the run of the best boudoirs in Naples and a success that has made more than one envious; but poems do not pay—and we have our work to do. Do you follow me, Cristo?"

"What is the use of talking? I know all that you would say," answered Borgoncini fiercely, lifting up his head.

"Good! That saves trouble," returned the other.

"Well, then, to details. Where are the arms and ammunition that you were trusted to buy?"

"In the makers' workshops," he replied.

"Not bought?"

"No."

"Not negotiated for?"

"No."

"The time due to the Society spent in looking into a pair of blue eyes?"

No answer but a muttered oath.

"Money safe?"

"Yes," said Borgoncini, starting up. "Your blood-stained money *is* safe."

"So far, well. One complication the less," said the other. "You have been a negligent agent then?—not a a dishonest steward? The one is bad enough and you will have to reckon heavily for your fault; the other would have been fatal. Foolish boy, to risk your life for a woman! As if we have not all passed through the stage when Love was the one supreme good! But we have not all been such madmen as to sacrifice for our fancy—what shall I say?—honour, duty, the interests of a Brotherhood—and our own interests too, Cristo mio—our own safety perhaps"—he added slowly; "remembering that treachery is with us punishable by death."

"I know it all," said Borgoncini; "but I take the

hazard of the die. Take you the money and give me back my freedom. I want only to live in peace and obscurity."

"To continue the idyl? A sweet dream! Sorry, very, that it is impossible. You are too deeply committed, caro Cristo; you know too much to be given free flight into space. You mean well, I make no doubt; but one day the black wolf will thrust his muzzle into your door, the little ones will want bread, the blue-eyed will shed tears, and away will go the last shred of restraint. The secrets of the Society are sold for a consideration; and Judas makes a domestic fête with his thirty pieces of silver. No, no, Cristo mio; once a Brother, always a Brother! There is no way out of it now; and it is not our fault if you yourself have made your own bread bitter. You have not betrayed, but you have failed in your trust; and you will have to answer for it to those who can question and adjudge. Meanwhile, you are in my power and are my prisoner. So be wise, my dear; make the best of things, and remember that you have only yourself to thank for your unpleasant position. Now, good night. I will make myself comfortable here. To-morrow perhaps your Countship will see that I have a sleeping-room next to yours; and if not to be had here, then you will pack up and attend me to another place. Good night. Sleep well, and don't dream. I

am a light sleeper myself, and dreamers soon disturb me," he said significantly, as he thrust the young fellow from the room and barricaded the door after him.

V.

THEIR happiness was over. They had left it behind them on the mountain-side, with the lost sunshine and the withered flowers, and the darkness of the dale into which they had come was but a prevision of the darkness that fell now on their lives. They were never alone. In the house, in their walks, from early morning to late night, this man Franz followed them like their shadow. He silenced their speech; he intercepted their looks; he seemed as it were to forbid their love by the covert jeer, the malicious jest with which he paraphrased a chance expression, commented on an interrupted moment of fancied security. Once when he called Moira Borgoncini's "wife" he laughed; and he had a way of insisting on the wealth, the title, the patrician Roman blood and all the splendours of the Count's home surroundings that evidently made the young fellow writhe, and that even to Moira sounded odd and caused her to wonder what he meant.

And yet Borgoncini tolerated him! When Moira,

with tears in her eyes, begged that he might be told to go away, her husband, paler than death, more sorrowful than sin, answered back that it was impossible. He too hated this interruption to their happy life even more than she did, and resented this man's manner; but he owed him his life—more than his life; and they had, moreover, business together which made it an imperative necessity that he should stay until it was finished. When finished, then Franz would leave, and they would go back to their old happiness and love.

"You know best, my beloved," said Moira fondly; "but," with a sigh, "I wish he was not here! Nothing is the same since he came. You are sorrowful; the very sight of him makes me shudder; and I hate him because I see he vexes you. You are too good to him, husband; you are too gracious."

She did not add that he was too trustful and did not see what she was made to feel—the insolent love made to her by this man, his friend, this gipsy-looking daredevil, the Hungarian Franz. Woman-like, she shrank from saying what might involve her husband in a quarrel, and preferred to suffer in silence rather than drag him into complications. Meanwhile, letters were written both by Franz and Borgoncini—those of the former were for some place and person abroad; that of Borgoncini was to the banker's where was lodged that sum of five thousand pounds, with an order

to transfer the same to the address of Mr. Smith, Post-office, Ulverston.

Pending the answers Franz stuck to the young lovers like a leech. The glory of the summer passed into the mists and rains of autumn; and day by day the insolent love-making of the Hungarian grew more bold; the dumb despair of Borgoncini less possible to conceal; the vague terror of the poor little wife more painful and overpowering. She saw that something was gravely wrong, but she did not know what—only that her beloved was unhappy; and it was this shameful man who made him so. If only they could be once more alone—if only she could be freed from the incubus of this degrading admiration, and Cristoforo relieved from the burden that now oppressed him! And how desperately it did oppress him! Even when they were alone her love could not cheer him, nor his for her encourage him. Something seemed to have gone out of him—and in truth, something had gone out of him! Surely Lucifer, when flung out of heaven, could not have known more the anguish of an infinite joy lost for ever and for ever than did he, Count Borgoncini, the husband of Moira Arthur!

At last the answers to those letters, for which the man had been waiting, came to hand; and a new page in the dark drama was turned.

VI.

Their first separation! It was to be for a full day. "Only for a day," said Franz, with a sneer at the eternity into which love lengthened those six short hours. But business must be done, even where men and women love like Cristoforo and Moira; and the money lying at the post-office at Ulverston—five thousand pounds in clean crisp bank-notes—must be taken up by the one to whom the packet was addressed. Borgoncini was thus absolutely obliged to go; and Franz said that he would go too, to bear him company. When the young wife asked also for leave to accompany them, the Hungarian laughed in his insolent way.

"Pretty birds are best in their cages," he said. "We will bring you back a box of bon-bons to console you for our absence."

"Only till this evening, Moira," said her husband, not looking at her; "the day will soon pass."

"It is like taking the life out of me," cried Moira, flinging herself into his arms in spite of Franz and his glittering eyes. "It seems as if I shall never see you again."

"What a thing this love is!" said Franz, shrugging his shoulders and laughing quietly. "Six hours' absence, and behold, a vale of tears and the desolation

of a life! Come, caro mio, trains do not wait. If we are to get back to-night we must go this morning, and we have no time to lose. Addio, bella signorina—mille pardons!—signora, I should say. I will come back to you safe and sound; so will Cristoforo, never fear!"

He placed his arm in that of the Count's, and dragged him a little roughly away.

"Now because you are a noble and I am a nobody, you will take a first-class ticket and I a third," said Franz with authority, when they came to the station. "I do not mind losing sight of you so far. The bird at home is my surety that you will attempt no escape from the train or such-like mad pranks; and I shall see the canaille as they are and save my pence. Ecco! not a word. It is better so; and I insist."

He made Borgoncini take the tickets as he indicated, he himself not speaking; and then he watched the young Count to his seat, and stood by the carriage-door till the train was just starting. With a hasty "We shall meet again," he ran backward as if making for the third-class carriages—but he let them all pass by; and the train steamed out of the station without him.

"Addio!" he said as it rushed along. "Poor moth, how have you singed your wings!"

He laughed as he said this, and with rapid strides went on his way to the cottage where Moira sat trembling, fearing, grieving.

He lifted the latch quietly and went in. She started up when she saw him and uttered a low cry.

"Where is my husband?" she said.

"Compose yourself, dear child, compose yourself," he answered in what was meant to be a soothing voice and manner. "No great harm is done. It is only a slight accident."

"Accident! what has happened? For mercy's sake tell me what it is!" she cried.

"I hope no more than a sprain. Yet it may be that the limb is broken. However, there he lies, helpless, and bade me come down to you to take you to him."

"And help—men—many men!" said Moira wildly.

"When I have taken you to him, to keep him company and drive away the vultures, then I will go for men," said Franz. "*You* must come now."

"Yes, yes! where?" she cried.

"He is on the mountain-side. We made a short cut, and behold the disgrazia! We shall soon find him. Come!"

Never had there been an easier trap, never a more confiding victim. Breathless, neither seeing nor knowing where she went nor what she did, Moira followed the Hungarian up the steep Miner's Path, until she found herself at the edge of a sharp and sudden ravine, the walls of which were as smooth as if cut by a knife, and at the bottom of which foamed a turbulent stream

swollen by the late rains into a fierce and dangerous torrent. The place was thickly covered with bracken; just such a place as Borgoncini and she had so often rested in on their long happy rambles while yet it was all peace and love and before the day of vengeance had arrived.

Here Franz halted.

"This is our station," he said. "Sit down."

"Where is my husband? where is Cristoforo?" said Moira, looking round her in terror.

The Hungarian took his watch from his pocket.

"At this moment? almost at that town—Ulverston, is it not? Yes; almost there, I should say," he answered. "Now, don't scream," he continued, grasping her arm. "It will only fatigue your throat and do no earthly good. No one will hear you but a few poor little half-frightened birds; and why should you scare them? Neither heaven nor hell can help you, carina. You are in my power, and must submit."

As he said this he took her in his arms and forced her to the ground; but, because he had something to say and she beat him off with such desperate strength and courage, he drew his hands away from her waist, and placed himself at a little distance from her.

What he said seemed to daze and stupefy her rather than to agonize or rouse. She was not able, apparently, to take it all in: only to be conscious of a great dark-

ness and a heavy blow. Cristoforo was not Count Borgoncini, said Franz; no count at all; but a waif and stray born no one knew where nor of whom, and brought up no one knew how; but, being clever and smart and handsome, he had got trimmed into the seductive shape in which he now appeared. He was the jeune premier of the Band; and his rôle was to be fitted out handsomely for the matrimonial market and sent to pick up rich widows with large means and small discretion. This time however, he had been commissioned to buy arms, not to make love; and the Brethren who had employed him were justly indignant at his breach of faith. He was to be punished; but she, if she were wise and good, should be spared. Her life depended on herself. As for the Band, who and what they were, that was not her affair. Perhaps they were patriots arming secretly for the liberation of their country; perhaps they were the International; or the Mafia of Sicily; or a small army of brigands; or only honest commis-voyageurs, trading in fowling-pieces. She might take her choice of the lot; but whatever they were, Cristoforo had been false to his trust and she was his wife only in name. How could she be anything else, when he had been married to at least three rich widows who had set up the finances of the Band on such a splendid footing as that which they now held? There were three lost sheep at this moment

bewailing both their shepherd and their fleeces; and unless the law allows of polygamy in virtuous Albion, she was no wife, how much soever a lover.

Now, he said, what would she elect to do? Would she go with him, Franz, and be the queen of the Band? He was the highest but one in command, and his bride would be the empress of the little kingdom. She should have everything that the heart of woman could desire; and she would find, what so few do find in this life, that the reparation of her mistake gave her more glory and happiness than if she had never made it. What did she say? Would she go with him?

"With you? Never!" cried Moira, clasping her hands and starting up. "Whatever Cristoforo may be, I love him! I love him!"

"You love him; and you forgive him for having deceived you?"

"Yes; a thousand times! I would rather be what I am to him than the queen of the world!" she cried wildly, rushing to the side of the ravine.

"I am sorry for you," said Franz, with a strange expression on his evil face, as with one clear bound he stood by her side and caught her in his arms. "But," he said insolently, "you are a pretty little thing; and worthy of a man's love."

It was late in the evening when Borgoncini came

back from Ulverston, bringing with him that fatal five thousand pounds. When he missed Franz at the Ulverston station he knew quite well that some devilry was going on at Coniston; but what could he do? He was as completely powerless as if he had been bound with cords to a stake. He was here, and Franz was there; and no rage, no despair could bridge over the distance between them. Now, however, he was at home again and he should know the worst—if, indeed, there was aught of bad to know, save in his own timorous fancy.

As he was dashing up the road Franz met him, lounging leisurely along smoking.

"Where is she? Where is Moira?" asked Cristoforo.

"Tut, tut! business first, mon cher; the woman afterwards. Where is the money? Gently, gently! Who flings bank-notes into the mud like this? Your English residence has not improved your manners, my friend. Would you oblige me by picking up that packet and handing it to me as one gentleman to another?"

"Now, you black devil, rid me of your presence for ever. We are quits, and I have done with you and your cursed Band once for all!" said Cristoforo.

Franz smiled.

"You go a little fast, mon cher. It seems to me that you have forgotten your oath and our motto—Fidelity

or Death. Do you expect the Brothers to make an exception in your Countship's favour? You will be a bad investment for them if they do, remembering how much you have cost them in 'properties.'"

Borgoncini covered his face with his hands and groaned.

"Are you ill, mon cher?" asked Franz in a sympathetic tone. "Come, let us find your—wife; perhaps she will cure you. I must tell you she is not in the house. I left her on the mountain, and promised to take you to her. She did not like being alone with me, and I respected her scruples; but I know where she is. Come, and I will guide you."

Every nerve strung, every fibre quivering, Borgoncini followed the Hungarian, as with a long, swift, panther-like step he led the way up the steep mountain-side. Not a word was spoken between them. The sun had sunk behind a bank of clouds, and the twilight was coming on. You only knew that the sun had gone by the colder grey of the sky, the deeper chill of the air. Not a living thing was about; and in the village below already a few lights told of the home-gathering of the workers. Not a man to help, not a woman to pity; only these two striding up the mountain-side in the cold, grey, gloomy twilight.

At last they reached the place where Franz had left Moira since the afternoon. She was lying as if asleep

on the heather. Her hair was tossed about her face in wild disorder—was it the wind that had torn it so unmercifully?—at a short distance, where the bracken had been broken and trampled on, lay her hat and handkerchief; in her hand was clasped the locket that contained Cristoforo's portrait; but the chain had cut into her neck, as if it had been seized by a strong hand while she had fought hard for her life and her love, Now however, she lay quiet, pale, stiff; her blue eyes half open—a look of terror still on her dead face—and the neatest little bullet-hole right through her heart.

Borgoncini cast himself down by the side of his dead love and took her in his arms.

Franz drew his revolver from his pocket.

"Very sorry, mon cher," he said; "but I am bound by my orders. And you have been faithless."

Only the night-birds heard that short sharp report, that one despairing cry; and night-birds tell no more tales than do the dead.

"A pretty pair of suicides!" said the Hungarian, as he placed the pistol in Borgoncini's lifeless hand. "I never trusted him; he was soft, and had moments of remorse. But he was a pleasant kind of bon diable; and if he could have kept free from sentiment he would have done. O these women! Father Adam, father Adam! what have you to answer for by your weak compliance with Eve and that old snake!"

That tall slight man with the fair hair and curiously bronzed face, who had lost his way among the mountains and came down on the Windermere station by the early morning, had no news to bring of strange things seen or done over there by Coniston Old Man. And when, many days after this, the bodies were found as they lay, stark among the heather, there was no witness to tell how they came by their death save that mute evidence of the pistol in the dead man's hand. But, said the surgeon who examined the bodies at the inquest, men do not shoot themselves through the back.

How that might be no one ever could say for certain. The dark foreigner who had visited the two pleasant young people had disappeared like a falling meteor flashing through the night; and not the faintest trace of his name, his nationality, his destination, was left behind. The mystery, such as it was, no man ever solved:—neither who was Franz the Hungarian, nor who Borgoncini the Anglo-Italian; neither what was the Band to which both belonged, nor what the real object of the mission to England; nor yet why Moira and the man who loved her should have been so cruelly murdered. The only things in the whole drama patent to all were, that the man who called himself Cristoforo Borgoncini was not the real Count, seeing that he, the true man, came over to England fully accredited; that

the two young people had loved each other well, he in crime and sorrow, she in faith and trust; and that they were found dead on the mountain-side—the one shot through the heart faceways, the other through the lungs from the back.

MY DAY OF DANGER.

MY DAY OF DANGER.

Child! take my advice—Do not! You say it is such a little thing, of no consequence whatever; but little things are the beginnings of great ones, and the dyke does not give way all at once with a crash. You say, too, that every one does it, from the Royal Family downwards; that it always has been so—the worship of beauty being part of man's nature and inheritance; and that it is the present method only which is new. I do not deny it; but the difference lies in that very fact of method, which I think so important and of which you make so light.

Beautiful women have always been objects of admiration, and men have always liked to possess the counterfeit presentment, even where they have never seen the original. Yes; I know all that; but, as a marble statue—a Clytie or Psyche—as a painting by an old master, or even as an engraving, a beautiful woman, though still an object of admiration, is not

a personal possession in the sense in which a modern photograph is a personal possession. Art gives you the sense of stateliness and spirituality—something to be admired as a representative, not an individual—but photography puts the key of the house into the hands of a crowd, and throws open the most sacred treasures to the coarse gaze of the public.

You know that I am no prude, dear; and you know too, that I have been through it all; and so far I am entitled to speak. If you like, I will tell you my history, and then you will be able to judge for yourself whether this mania for photographic publicity is always as innocent in its results as you seem to think.

You know I was very young when I married Oscar; and naturally I was inexperienced and impressionable; and foolish too. I had seen nothing whatever of the world; and down in our quiet home among the mountains I had never been accustomed to luxury, excitement nor admiration. Oscar was the first man who had ever made love to me; and it is not to be wondered at if I loved him in return. You see what a dear fellow he is—not handsome, I know, but how good and kind! But indeed you do not know half his goodness; no one but myself does. Of course, he is rather old for me; but the twenty years that lie between seventeen and thirty-seven are not so plainly visible then as perhaps they become afterwards. At

all events, I loved him very dearly; or I fancied that I did; and it was a good marriage for me. I had no fortune; there were five sisters younger than I; and though Oscar is not what you would call rich, still he is not poor; and to us, down at Thornydike, two thousand a year sounded almost like forty thousand.

After the regulation tour we came to London to this house, and were soon in the thick of fashionable society. Oscar seemed to me to know every person there was to know; and as he was both proud and fond of me, he liked to take me out a great deal, both to show me off and to give me pleasure. It was quite natural; and, after all, men do not marry young wives who are called beautiful by their friends—and their mirrors, do you say?—well, perhaps, Linda mia!—but you must not flatter—to shut them up in back parlours as if they were spectres to be ashamed of. Only the foolishly jealous would do this; and Oscar was not this.

Well, as I said, we went out an immense deal, and I was soon a "feature" in our circle. I made a sensation. Great people courted me; royalty itself distinguished me; well-bred crowds mobbed me to get what is called a good look at my stupid little face; artists begged me to sit to them; sculptors modelled from me; photographers besieged me for my portrait; milliners offered to dress me for next to nothing if I would wear their patterns and say where I got them from, and give my name to

neckties and bonnets, cloaks and colours; my photograph was everywhere, even in ginshops and on handkerchief-boxes; in short, I was the Reigning Beauty of the season, and the talk of the whole town, from the City to the West-End.

You may imagine that my head was a little turned. Perhaps I ought not to say a little; but indeed it was scarcely to be wondered at! I was very young, and I had no child to fill up the measure of my affections and take my thoughts away from myself and my triumphs.

I think the pace got a little too killing for Oscar at this time, and that he would have been glad to have had me more to himself, and to have been sometimes at home and without visitors; but we were in the swim, as people say—I cannot help this horrid habit of slang!—and we could scarcely draw out of it. And by this time too I did not wish to draw out of it; for I had gone headlong into its dissipation and felt as if I could not live in anything else. It was a brilliant, heartless, unworthy kind of existence. Looking back I can see it all so plainly in its glitter, its hollowness—and its desperate fascination! There was no Love in it anywhere. I had flatterers, toadies, courtiers, acquaintances by the hundred and thousand; but not one whom I loved or who really loved me.

Yet I did not miss this element of true and living love, and I did not want it. I wanted only excite-

ment—the merest superficiality of emotion—and I began to be a little indifferent even to my husband. Monotony was the one thing I most dreaded, and his love had, of course, grown monotonous by habit. It was better fun to see myself in all the shop-windows under a dozen different aspects, and to be the great point of attraction to the crowds standing there—to go into the park and be at once surrounded by an adoring body-guard—to see myself pointed out by the habitual loungers against the rails—than to take a walk with my husband in the dull square gardens, or a *tête-à-tête* drive through the humdrum suburbs.

Vanity was fast separating us in all the essential oneness of marriage; but I did not suffer, though I think he did. I know that he tried to draw me in a little, and especially to put a stop to this perpetual photographing which was really a part of my very existence; but I had become spoilt by indulgence and flattery, and I would not give in on one single point. He could not use force; I would not yield to reason; and I was such a silly child, it was enough for me if he did not absolutely prevent me to make me feel sanctioned and at liberty. He must have suffered very much, poor fellow! How plainly one can see things when one looks back after the mist and heat of the moment have passed!

I was just twenty-one when we met Captain Comber-

mere; and very soon after, the Mrs. Price whom you know brought to our house a certain Mr. Arrowsmith, who was also an acquaintance of Captain Combermere's. These two have always been mixed up together in my mind; at first because I knew them both at the same time, and afterwards because of all that happened.

You never knew Captain Combermere? I wish you had! He was an ideal kind of man; some one met once in a lifetime, if even that once. He was the bravest officer in his regiment; as good and true as Oscar; and wonderfully handsome—where my dear husband has, as you see, only the beauty of virtue. And he was quite young. He was then just five and twenty, in the very prime of his life. I made his acquaintance on his twenty-fifth birthday. I remember the date because he told me afterwards that he took it as a good omen—as the beginning of a new life for him.

I never knew any one so gifted, so delightful as he was. He could do everything, and he had no vanity. Really, Linda, without exaggeration, he was almost perfect! Don't be shocked, dear, that I, a married woman, cannot keep the tears out of my eyes when I think of him. Poor Margrave! poor Margrave!

Well! we took to each other from the beginning, and were soon the best of friends possible. We had that kind of sympathy which made us see the best of

each other, and be our best selves when we were together, which was very often, as he soon became absolutely necessary to my existence.

Naturally the world began to talk of this friendship and to put its own construction on it. I did not know this at the time, and I do not think I would have much cared if I had. Looking back on this part of my life too, I know that a very little would have made me reckless and desperate; it was only because Oscar was so wise that things went smoothly. I see this now; for once, when my husband objected to Captain Combermere's coming so often to the house, and said that as I was young and beautiful and much in sight of the world, it was necessary to be careful of appearances, I made a scene that I am ashamed to remember, and said a thousand unjust and horrid things. I accused Oscar of tyranny and selfishness, of jealousy and spite, of low, base, ignoble feeling; and the poor darling bore it all so tenderly, so patiently! I blush now when I remember the way in which he came up to me and took hold of my hands—only I drew them passionately away—and said:

"No, no, Zoe! It is none of all these things, my darling. It is only because you are young and do not know yourself that I want to guard you from misrepresentation and danger. I married you to be your friend and protector, not your tyrant—your lover, not your

gaoler. Perhaps I did wrong to marry you at your age and with your total inexperience; but God knows I loved you as faithfully as ever man loved a woman, and I love you now even more than then. But you must not break my heart, my darling, by being untrue to your own pure self!"

I felt in my secret soul how sweet and good he was in speaking to me like this; but I was too excited and wilful to yield to my impulse of throwing my arms round his neck and asking him to take me away. I resisted the promptings of my good angel, Linda, and I saw his poor face grow pale and his eyes look as if there were tears behind them; and to my dying day I shall never forget the long, sad, tender look he gave me, as he said:

"Well, Zoe, what is it to be? Will you take my advice as the advice of a friend, and not be seen so much about with Combermere?—or do you mean to defy the world and pain me more, perhaps, than you know?"

"I am too proud to be dictated to by a few idle gossips," I said; "and too staunch to give up such a pleasant friend as Captain Combermere because people who have nothing else to do choose to say spiteful things. I certainly do *not* intend to give him up—never! never! unless he himself wishes it; and that he will not do, any more than I shall. If you

insist upon my not seeing him as I have done, Oscar, I will go home to my mother. I will not stay to be dictated to like a child, or to be made to feel as if I had done something wrong, when I have not."

Then I burst into a violent flood of tears. I scarcely knew why I cried so bitterly, but do what I would I could not stop myself, and I felt really as if my heart were breaknig. Oscar was very, very good and kind. He took me in his arms, and held my head on his breast so tenderly, so gently!—and after a time I seemed to weep myself into calmness, or something like it. Then he kissed my forehead, and said:

"Do not be afraid, dear. I will neither coerce nor interfere with you. I will trust to your own good sense and good feeling that you will never forget you are my wife and your mother's daughter."

After this no more was said about Margrave and his visits; but I saw that Oscar kept more with me than he had ever done before, that he grew very grave and often seemed lost in thought, with such a sad face! It made my heart ache to see him; but when I used to go up to him and say some pleasant little word, or put my hand on his stubbly head, it was like a transformation scene. I have even seen his eyes filled with tears. But I was terribly uncertain in my temper in those days. At times I felt almost as if I hated him, and at times I longed for him to take me quite away,

and let us be alone together somewhere, until I had come out of the fever in which I was. I was so restless, so dissatisfied! Nothing pleased me but excitement; and I went into society as a man takes to drinking. In fact it was moral dram-drinking with me, and made me forget myself.

I did not know what it was too that at this time made me dislike to be alone with Margrave Combermere almost as much as I disliked being alone with my husband. I could not speak when we were alone, and his words or his silence equally embarrassed me. If he looked at me I felt overwhelmed with an odd kind of distress—half distress, half joy—and if he did not look at me I could scarcely refrain from saying: "Why do you turn away from me? Have I offended you in any way?" In short, the whole position was one of the most miserable unrest, and I could only bear myself, as I have said, when in such a turmoil of excitement that I could neither feel nor think.

You know that we are not rich. Two thousand a year does not go far in London in the society in which we live; and, though I tried to make simplicity fashionable, still even simplicity costs money, and I was often dreadfully hard up. But I had no secrets of this kind from Oscar. I did not tell him all the flattering things that men said to me, but I never concealed facts that might come out and give him pain, as well

as put me in a false position, by making me seem deceitful and double-dealing. He was exceedingly generous to me, making only one stipulation—that I should never accept presents of any kind from other men. I wonder now at myself when I think how selfish and heartless I was to him, and how I took every farthing I could get from him, just for vanity—for a dress or a bonnet or a necklace that I took a fancy to, and thought I should look well in! Oh, Linda, what an awful curse to women this vanity is!

But now such an awful thing happened to me—the one dreadful punishment of my folly.

There was a certain obscure photographer to whom I had sat continually. For I was so infatuated about having my portrait everywhere that I refused no one; and I must say of myself too, that I am good-natured and glad to do a service when I can. This man, this wretched creature, came and implored me to sit to him. He said that he was sinking under his poverty, but that I should make his fortune if I would sit to him very often and in a great many different dresses and attitudes, so as to make it appear that he was my photographer-in-chief. And as I believed his story, and thought him just a poor, hard-working, honest fellow in want of a helping hand to lift him over the stile, I did. He took several portraits of me, all good in their way; and at last he took one that was

perfect. You know it; I gave you one. It is the most splendid thing that has ever been done of me. It is supreme. You remember it, do you not?—that one in the ball-dress, with the hair a little disordered, some flowers lying loosely in the falling braids, and others scattered on the floor; the hands holding a necklace that has just been taken off, and the head thrown back on a cushion. He called it "After the Ball."

There is a certain tender, languid look in it that I know is my most becoming, because most natural, expression; and to tell you the truth I was thinking of Margrave when it was taken—thinking what a splendid man he was, and how proud his mother and sisters must be of him!

It so happened that while the photographer was showing me the proofs—for he himself brought them to my house—Margrave came in. I shall never forget the look he gave me when he saw this picture. It seemed as if I saw his very soul, the very inside of his heart. He almost trembled; and his face became quite pale. I felt mine grow crimson, and I could scarcely speak for sudden strange agitation. Margrave spoke to me in French, and said how beautiful he thought the photograph. It was his, he said, and should ever be to him as the image of his saint to the worshipper, something that expressed to him all the beauty and poetry and hopelessness of life. He said a

great deal more of the same kind, always rapidly and always in French; and I was so disturbed I could not answer, which, perhaps, made things look worse; for I found out afterwards that the photographer understood French like English, and therefore knew all that Margrave had been saying.

In the midst of it all who should be announced but that detestable Mr. Arrowsmith, of whom I have told you nothing yet. I have not much to tell indeed, except that openly he professed the most profound respect and admiration for me, and secretly made horrid love to me, which I repulsed with a good deal of disgust and indignation; for he was such a horror! and I felt that it degraded both Margrave and Oscar—both my friend and my husband—to let him even look at me with his ugly, fishy eyes, screwed up into that hideous kind of leer which he thought languishing and loving. Consequently, he really hated me while he pretended to be one of my most devoted admirers. And he hated Margrave too, because he thought that I liked him better than his own odious self; and I am as certain as of my own existence that he was at the bottom of all that followed.

Some little time after this I received a letter from the photographer enclosing a new carte, or rather, it was the old one manipulated, as you know can be done. It had been made quite another thing. I cannot

explain what had been done, but the man had given a new meaning to the whole pose, and had put in touches and slight alterations here and there, which—from what had been, I grant you, a rather risky picture from the beginning, though such a pretty one—had made it indescribably horrible. Margrave was kneeling by the side of the couch, his hands clasped in mine on my knees. How that wretch had got hold of his photograph I cannot tell. Perhaps that hateful Mr. Arrowsmith had given it to him. I think he must.

Accompanying the photograph, which, you understand, would have been simple ruin to my character for ever had it been published, was an insolent letter from the photographer, demanding a large sum of money for suppressing it. I had my choice—to pay him something like five hundred pounds or to let the picture be published.

I could not deny the original pose. There it was in all the shop-windows; and though I knew that the whole thing was simply made up to extort money, I did not dare to go to my husband and ask his advice and protection. Had it been any one but Margrave, or had I been alone in the photograph, I would have done so; but as things were I could not. I can scarcely say why, but I felt as if I should have died of shame, and something that was almost worse, had I spoken to Oscar or shown him the picture.

I was in despair, as you may imagine—helpless and friendless. I dared not go to my husband, still less to Margrave himself; and I had no money wherewith to buy that villain's mercy. Mr. Arrowsmith came in while I was sitting there in my room crying as if my heart would break. It was only the second time since my career as a Beauty that I had allowed myself the damaging luxury of tears. But now nature was stronger than vanity, and I braved the horror of a red nose and swollen eyes for the relief which this passionate weeping brought me. Of course I made an effort to conceal my trouble, but Mr. Arrowsmith must have been blind not to have seen it. Besides, he knew too much; and probably expected what he found.

He asked me what was the matter in apparently the kindest and nicest way imaginable; but I would not tell him. Naturally not! But if he knew of it all, as I thought afterwards—indeed, am sure—he did not need to be told. After a little time he said: "Do not be offended with me, Mrs. Dampier, but allow me the privileges of a friend—one of the most sincere that you have. I know, of course, that Dampier is not wealthy, and that in your position there are many expenses which do not come into a man's ordinary calculations. If you are in want of money, let me be your banker. It will be the happiest day in my life if I can show you how true and faithful a friend

I am to you. A woman like you, young and beautiful, needs such a friend as I. Tell me your difficulty, and let me lift you out of it."

Ah, Linda, how weak and credulous trouble makes us! Like the drowning man who catches at a straw, a woman in extremity will believe in the disinterested friendship of the worst man she knows, if he puts things gently and conceals the cloven hoof with artful care. At the first, however, I held out; but after a time I gave in. I was forced; for when he found that I would not confess to him of my own free will, he told me that he knew already what was distressing me, for that scoundrelly photographer had shown him a proof of the new picture, and he guessed the result. He had come on at once, he said, to see me and learn how matters really were; and if, as he supposed, the man had threatened me with the publication of the photograph unless I gave him a sum of money, I should be simply committing suicide if I did not accept his offer of a cheque to settle the affair off-hand.

I was so bewildered and worn out, so frightened and demoralized altogether, that I suddenly gave way. I heard my husband's step coming up the stairs, and crushed and terrified, scarcely knowing what I did, I let Mr. Arrowsmith put a cheque into my hand, and really almost mechanically, I thrust it into the pocket of my dress;—and for the first time felt guilty and

degraded. It was my initiation into active deceit and personal humiliation.

But I was safe for the moment; and when you are in deadly peril any delay is valuable.

Child! never, never be induced to do such a thing as this! I had better have dealt with the photographer than this detestable man, this Mr. Arrowsmith. The one was a vulgar extortioner who could be bought off, and who, when he had received his stipulated sum of money, stood honestly enough by his bargain and attempted nothing more. But the other thought to have me in his power, and to use that power as a conqueror dictating terms. When I flung him off, and told him what I thought of him, I had to face the same awful misery as before, with this humiliation superadded. He took the photograph out of his pocket and said: Very well; he would show this at his club, and pin on to it the cheque which he had given me for its suppression, and then he would leave the world to form its own conclusions. I was too thankful to get rid of him to realize the full horror of his threat. Perhaps in my heart I hoped he would not carry it out.

But he did. And I soon knew of it.

Every successful person, no matter who, nor in what direction his success may lie, has his or her detractors; and the life of a Professional Beauty is made up of flattery and slander, admiration and envy, in about

equal parts. There were hundreds of jealous women and disappointed men who were only too glad to have an opportunity against me; and the poison ran through society like the poison of a snake-bite through the blood. Men were insolent and familiar; women were cool; and my husband, who saw that something was wrong, was bewildered and distressed. Margrave, who also saw that something was wrong, was furious against every one. It was some time before he found out the cause of it all, but at last a good fellow in the club told him, to put him on his guard—so he said—and enable him to take some steps for my protection. And when he knew what it all meant, he came and spoke to me about it.

How pale he was when he came into the room—how low and changed his voice! I should scarcely have known it was he who spoke if I had not seen him. He sat down by me, but not very near—at some little distance, with the table between; as if he distrusted himself; and then, without any affectation of preface or pretence, he went right up to the subject. He told me what he knew and what he had seen; and though he was sorry, he said, that I had not had confidence in him and had allowed that scoundrel, Arrowsmith, to get me into his power, because I had not had faith enough to trust to him or my husband, yet he could understand my feelings; and if he was grieved for

the result, he respected the cause. But now, he said, there was only one thing to be done; I must tell my husband the whole story.

When he said this I thought he would have choked or died. He could scarcely speak, and he looked really as if he would have expired as he sat there. I was stunned—half faint, half dizzy. It seemed so dreadful to have to speak to Oscar about it all, and I was strangely grieved that Margrave should advise it. I do not know what I wanted him to advise instead, but I did not want this!

He looked at me with those clear, loving, honest eyes of his; but they were not so clear now; they looked dim and blurred as if they had been full of tears—not that they were, but they looked so. I do not know what he saw, or thought he saw, on my face, but he suddenly left his seat and came to the sofa where I was sitting.

"There is only this way," he said in a low voice; "or one other. You must throw yourself on to the protection of your husband, or——"

He did not finish his speech, but suddenly took me in his arms and pressed me to him as if he would have pressed my very life into his.

"My darling! my darling!" I heard him whisper. "I love you, God knows how much! Come with me!"

——then he released me and got up. "No, no," he said, "you are too good to be ruined. I will bear the pain

alone, but you, my darling, shall be saved. Promise me that you will confide in your husband, and that you will never forget the man who loved you better than his own life, and who sacrificed his happiness to your honour! This is the first kiss I have taken from you, Zoe—my life—my Zoe; and it shall be the last, for I must leave you now—for ever!"

I heard no more. I remember only a sharp, sudden pain at my heart, so that I screamed out; and then all was dark. When I came to myself again my maid was bathing my temples, and Oscar was standing by holding my hands.

I have very little more to tell you now, Linda. I kept my word to Margrave, and told the whole story to Oscar. I never knew what he said or did; but Mr. Arrowsmith suddenly disappeared from London, and by degrees society thawed to me again. All my photographs as suddenly disappeared out of the shop-windows as did Mr. Arrowsmith from London, and my husband made me promise that I would not be taken any more—at least, for public sale. Margrave Combermere went away. He volunteered, as you know, to India; and there he was killed. Do not be surprised at these tears, Linda. I love my good Oscar, but Margrave was inexpressibly dear to me. He was my friend—the best and truest that ever woman had, and if I did not love him I should have no heart at all.

But, Linda dear, take my advice—abjure the calling of a Professional Beauty as you would abjure any other danger. Think what would have become of poor Oscar and of me if Margrave had been different from what he was! My friend, dear, dear friend! Oh, Linda, if I had only seen him in time!—Heaven forgive me for such a wicked speech!—Come, dear, let us talk of something else. This is done with for ever. Will you come for a drive with me? Oscar is at the British Museum to-day. Let us go and fetch him. It will please him, poor fellow! And he is so good. And, if you do not mind, we will take little Lina. She is three years old now, and is not troublesome.

LANGTHWAITE.

LANGTHWAITE.

Langthwaite was in a state of excitement. Its morals were perturbed and its ideas confused; its old landmarks were being swept away and it did not approve of its new bearings. Langthwaite notions were assaulted, and Langthwaite morality was put to shame. Madame Floriani, the Italian widow, had dared to defy the authority and disturb the influence of Mr. Bentley, the young Incumbent. Was Langthwaite to be ruled over by a strange woman who introduced foreign customs and upset the existing institutions, or was its government to be a virtuous hierarchy as before? Was the cousin of a dean, or the widow of an Italian count, to be considered the first personage of the vale? This grave question was what Langthwaite was called on to decide; and the quiet valley in the heart of the mountains lashed itself into a state of perturbation, strongly suggestive of the famous tempest that once was brewed in a teapot.

The origin of the evil was this :—

When old Jacob White, the miser who built Whitefield House of stone and marble and furnished it with painted deal and calico, died, he left all his wealth to a certain niece of his, a sister's child who had been born and bred and married in Rome, and who was now Count Floriani's widow. She was his only relative; and, although it went sorely against him to leave his wealth to one who was more than half a foreigner, yet family pride at last conquered national prejudice, and Madame la Contessa Floriani was made the heiress of Whitefield House and the lands circumjacent. This good fortune brought that Romanized young Englishwoman from the blue skies and bright sun of Italy to a remote village in the heart of the Cumberland mountains.

The society of Langthwaite was peculiar and beyond measure dull. Dull, because bigoted. The ideas of the denizens ran in the narrowest of all narrow gauges, out of which not a mind dared to move. The peculiarity of Langthwaite was its power of condemnation. Everything was wicked in its puritanic eyes. Life was a huge snare; the affections were temptations; amusements were sins; pleasure was a crime; novel-writers "had much to answer for," and novel-readers were next door to iniquity; an actor was a being scarcely less reprehensible than a murderer; and an

artist was lost to all moral sense—if indeed it ever chanced that artists were spoken of at all, for the Langthwaite intellect did not penetrate far into the regions of art. No one "living in the world" had a conscience; no foreigner had the faintest notion of virtue. Langthwaite was the centre of salvation, and outside its sphere revolved desolation and ruin.

There was a national school at Langthwaite where all the ladies went on different days and at different hours, to superintend, some the work, and some the spelling; and there was a Sunday school where every one fought for a class. It was the blue riband of Langthwaite to have a class in the Sunday school. There were a great many dissenting chapels and a great many missionary meetings. Religious excitement being the principal dissipation at Langthwaite, school feasts, Dorcas meetings, districts visitings, missionary sermons, awakening preachings and prayer meetings were infinite. The parish clergyman, Mr. Bentley, said that the parish was well worked; and so it was. It was worked until its mental condition was in such a state of turmoil and unrest that no one knew exactly what to believe.

To this society came Rosa Floriani, the widow of an Italian artist-count, certainly, and the semi-papistical latitudinarian, perhaps. Why she came to Langthwaite seemed a mystery to many. But it was in truth

no mystery:—she thought it was only right to live among her tenants and to do her best to the society which gave her her fortune.

She was a beautiful woman, about twenty-eight or thirty years of age, with fine blue eyes and light auburn hair, as soft and shining as silk, braided in two thick wavy masses of imprisoned curls. She was very pale, as if she had lived much in darkened rooms; but her lips were red, and so were her nostrils. She was about the middle size; one of those women with small bones and soft outlines who keep young and supple to the last. She was negligent but coquettish in her dress; with such taste in all her arrangements, that, when she received her visitors in a white muslin dressing-gown and small morning-cap, clinging, like trellis-work against flowers, to the curling hair, she seemed to be far better dressed than the Misses Grandville in their silks and satins and jewellery and lace, and of infinitely grander condition than they in their grand carriage with a footman six feet high. She was excessively indolent in her habits; at least the Langthwaite world said so; never, by any chance, "dressed" at eleven or twelve o'clock, which was the general time for paying morning visits in that part of the world and always receiving her *monde*, as she called them, upstairs in her dressing-room, in this kind of pretty negligence; very often wearing slippers, not shoes—

little slippers of blue or rose or brown satin, trimmed round with lace and ribbon and clacking on the ground as she walked, for they had no heels. And indeed it was said that Madame Floriani had been seen in the middle of the day, and even in the evening, in the same undress; which was very near to a crime in Langthwaite. But her abode was worse than her attire. She had fitted up Whitefield House with all her Roman treasures; and they scandalized Langthwaite. The Misses Grandville said they were quite shocked; and Mr. Bentley spoke through his nose, and sighed as he called the pretty woman "heathenish." She had casts of many of the best pagan statues set about her apartments, and she had objectionable pictures such as Saint Catherine's Marriage, the Madonna and Child, Saint Sebastian with his arrows and not too much drapery, the Judgment of Paris, a Venus rising from the sea, and a few martyrdoms. All this was like fire to stubble among the people of Langthwaite. But Madame Floriani, totally unconscious of the effect she was producing, only thought the Langthwaitians very cold in matters of art and strangely ignorant of real merit.

She was an artist herself; and sometimes when they came in their grand, stiff, expensive and ungraceful toilettes, they found her dressed in a man's brown holland blouse girded with a broad leathern band: while a little blue velvet cap, with a long tassel, was

stuck jauntily on the top of her graceful head, just above those curly handfuls of bright auburn hair. Whereat they were doubly shocked; and the Misses Grandville, very tall, bony and like desiccated gladiators, said she was really very unfeminine and that it positively was not proper.

Madame Floriani's worst enemy was Mr. Bentley. Mr. Bentley was the young Incumbent of Langthwaite. He was not more than thirty as it was, and he looked like twenty. He was a tall, round, boyish person with a round face and round cheeks highly coloured; an innocent little snub nose with those wide flat nostrils which make a grey-beard look a youth; light-grey eyes; narrow shoulders; red hands—very red—with the fingers always swollen, as if from chronic chilblains; and a full, unformed mouth, swollen too—like a boy's. But in spite of this round face with its ludicrous boyishness, Mr. Bentley had taken up the condemnatory and ascetic side. His sermons breathed more than Judaic severity; hatred of pleasure, hatred of art, hatred of liberation, hatred of everything but extreme Calvinistic tenets, church-going and missionary meetings. This was Mr. Bentley's profession of faith so far as he dare utter it even in Langthwaite. Yet his solemn looks and severe words were in such ludicrous contrast to that round, red, apple-face of his, which nature intended to express

only jollity, that more than once Madame Floriani looked up and laughed, saying, with her sweet voice and foreign accent, "But, Monsieur l'Abbé, assuredly you do not believe in yourself when you speak so!"

Which words used to make Mr. Bentley furious. As he said to the Misses Grandville, his fast allies, it was very painful to see Madame Floriani's unconverted state of mind. Thus the war between the pretty foreign woman and the grave young clergyman went on; and Langthwaite stood aghast.

Madame Floriani thought she must do something for the place; so, after every one had called, she began to give parties. Every one went to the first out of curiosity. Even Mr. Bentley, who disapproved of her so much that he called nearly every day at Whitefield —to try and convert her—even he went, though in general he was never seen at any evening party, where the object was not to sing hymns and hear a chapter expounded. But he made an exception in the fair foreigner's favour. Madame Floriani had arranged her rooms very prettily. She had brought in all the flowers from the greenhouse, and placed them about the hall and drawing-room. She had wreathed the chandeliers with evergreens mixed in with flowers; while large baskets of flowers, evergreens and moss, were placed on pedestals all about, and brilliantly lighted. The rooms were a flood of light—all except-

ing the little room off the drawing-room, which old Jacob White had called the study and which Madame Rosa said was her boudoir; and this was dark. One candelabrum of two wax-lights only, placed on a beautiful little buhl table, reflected by two large mirrors set in deep gold frames of grapes and vine leaves, and falling on a marble statue of Ariadne set within a draperied recess—this was all the light which Madame Floriani allowed in her boudoir. Many objects of art were about. There were models of the Coliseum and the Tower of Pisa, of the Lion in the Rock of Lucerne, of the Parthenon at Athens—and there were busts of famous men—Dante and Petrarch and Tasso; and pictures; a Magdalen by Giorgione, a Venus by Correggio, and views of Italy and Greece; and there was a carved book-case full of splendidly bound books, one of which was clasped with ivory and another had precious stones upon the cover. These, with curtains and draperies of rich rose-coloured silk, made up the furniture of Madame Rosa's boudoir. It was a new style of room in Langthwaite. They could not understand it. The soft dim light, the living beauty on the walls, the wealth, the art, the management of effect, all perplexed the worthy mountaineers and went far to convict Madame Floriani of some undesirable characteristics. The Misses Grandville, who led public opinion on matters of taste and propriety, peered into it curiously,

but stepped back again immediately, as if it had been a sorcerer's cave; and by way of being facetiously condemnatory, spoke to Madame Floriani of the "great white woman in the corner" as something they did not understand nor quite approve of.

The widow looked at them with the surprised open-eyed look that had become familiar to her since she came to Langthwaite, and then with her silvery good-humoured laugh cried out: "Why, my dear mademoiselle, that is Ariadne!"

"I wonder how you can like those horrible Greek stories!" said the eldest Miss Grandville severely. "We who know so much better things, to encourage those dreadful superstitions and idolatries in any way—it is shocking!"

"But, my dear demoiselle, you don't think that I believe in Ariadne as the Greeks did!" said Madame Rosa. "It is the art, not the goddess one loves!"

"Art!" cried Miss Grandville disdainfully; "art! What is art, I should like to know, but the worship of the creature? Art is more nearly sinful, Madame Floriani, than I am afraid you think it is!"

"Ah, mademoiselle! pity me! spare me! I have been brought up among the great things of art! I opened my eyes on the Coliseum—I have lived where Michael Angelo worked—I have drunk in love of art with my first breath. I cannot forget its rich lessons in this

ascetic doctrine of yours. On the contrary, I find in your beautiful country so much to love and admire, that I wonder you are so little gifted with the power of appreciating and reproducing the beauty He has created."

This was a long speech for Madame Rosa, and strangely free from foreign idioms. For she was excited and forgot to be careful.

"My dear madame," said Mr. Bentley solemnly; "you speak of natural religion only."

"Come! come! we must not discuss theology at a soirée," she exclaimed; "that would be a misuse of time indeed. Will you waltz, Miss Grandville?" And before that horrified lady could return an answer, the pretty widow had glided across the room in her peculiar manner of grace and lightness; and, going to the piano, dashed into a maddening waltz.

Now, to begin with, only two young ladies of the Langthwaite society could waltz, and these were the daughters of a retired captain who had the good luck to own relatives in London. But they were thought bold and light in Langthwaite (although as good girls as ever breathed), because they went to the opera and the theatres when they were in town, and confessed to the polka and waltzing. They were very pretty, lively and good-natured; and when Madame Rosa played her waltz, they both stood up and said that if others

would dance they would. There was no response. Some said: "What bold girls those Miss Winters are!" and others: "Oh, Laura and Helen Winter will go the whole way with any woman in the world! We cannot expect anything from them." And one old maid, who had never had an offer nor heard a word of love in her life, bit the end off the adjective "disgusting," and flourished her shawl—Shetland—tightly round her, as she thanked Heaven that she had never done such a thing when she was young! And then when Rosa turned round on her music-stool, with her hands in her lap, and said: "Eh, bien! who will dance?" Mr. Bentley came up: "Excuse me, Madame Floriani," he said rather nervously, for the widow looked so arch and lovely, that it required all Langthwaite severity to resist her; "You are a stranger to our customs, and you do not understand us yet. I hope that after you have been among us for a little time we shall be good friends and be able to work together. But we have banished all these frivolities from Langthwaite. My flock, I am happy to say, does not dance."

"Not dance, Monsieur! and why?" cried Rosa, with a burst of laughter—real southern laughter such as you never hear in polite society in England now.

"I look on dancing, Madame Floriani, as an invention of the enemy."

"What enemy—the Russians? Oh no, I assure you,

les Russes did not introduce the dance. That is drôle; I did not know you were such good patriots down here!" And she laughed again.

"But, Madame Floriana," said Miss Grandville, coming to the rescue; "we don't ourselves think dancing proper."

"Not proper!" said Rosa, flushing to her temples; "what monstrous ideas! What impropriety can there be in a party of young people amusing themselves with dancing or anything else convenable?"

"It is a worldly amusement," said Miss Grandville, stiffly.

"And a degradation of the immortal nature," said Mr. Bentley.

Madame Rosa looked from one to the other as if they had been Aztecs or Red Indians, or any other unusual specimens of humanity; then, utterly unable to find any sort of answer to such sentiments, she turned back to the piano and rattled off a brilliant fantasia, which no one understood and every one thought noisy.

It was the same with the games which Madame Rosa proposed. For, when dancing was forbidden, she thought she would enliven her society by games. At first every one refused to take part in them. They were dull, childish, uninteresting, a waste of time; but at last she gained over some of the younger girls and a stray Cantab or two whom she had managed to get

hold of somehow, no one knew how. "She must have fished them out of the lake," said Miss Grandville; for indeed, Cantabs were rare animals in Langthwaite, owing to the character for dulness and cant which that beautiful vale had gained in the university. A few used to come, certainly; generally pale young men, wearing spectacles and afflicted with colds; but Madame Floriani soon learnt to distinguish the various types, and to fly this type as she would poison. Yet even when she had gone so far as to positively establish games at her soirées, the Misses Grandville and the Bentleyites used to sit by grimly, and protest in loud whispers against the downward course of things in Langthwaite.

Madame Floriani was almost disheartened. Had it not been for that strange little bit of principle in her, that she owed it to the society of her place to do something pleasant for it, she would have given up the attempt of amusing it in despair. But it was a matter of conscientiousness, and she did not like to be defeated. Fortunately, just at the moment when she was most dispirited, she found that she had really made some way. Her fascinating manners, her beauty, her grace, her knowledge of the world, the purity and innocence of her mind, her tact and her imperturbable good-humour, at last had their weight. Added to which exterior circumstances, that great want of the human

heart—that want of life, of pleasure, of sensation, which no ascetic folly can destroy, however it may distort—began to make itself felt. The Misses Winter and many of the younger girls ranged themselves on Madame Floriani's side. They helped her in her soirées; they played at her games; they shared her picnics; they shot at her archery meetings; nay, they even danced to her waltzes; though Mr. Bentley was so angry that he did not speak to Miss Laura when he met her the next day, because he said, as the eldest, she ought to have known better, and was leading her younger sisters to destruction. Which made Laura cry, poor girl; but Helen called their Incumbent a detestable little fellow; though she felt as if she had spoken blasphemy when she said it. Altogether Langthwaite was decidedly divided into two parties, because of the waltzing that went on at Madame Floriani's Wednesday evenings.

No one could understand Mr. Bentley. He was the bitterest enemy that Madame Floriani had; at least to judge by his conversation; and yet, if it were so, why did he go so constantly to Whitefield House? and why, if he disapproved so highly of her conduct, did he still continue to attend her evening parties? He never missed one, by any chance, though the Misses Grandville and others were only waiting for his lead to follow him to open secession. And why did he turn pale when he

saw her coming down the lane?—and why did he turn red when he shook her hand? Miss Augusta Grandville, the youngest—she was thirty-four—who had been the beauty of the family and gave herself still the airs of a juvenile—Miss Augusta who had always been his fast ally, his most indefatigable district visitor, his head class teacher, his unfailing satellite, who would not have missed a missionary meeting nor a Bible class for all the world—Miss Augusta was uneasy. She did not like these symptoms; she did not like Mr. Bentley's leniency in still continuing to visit Madame Rosa; her voice was for war—an open declared right honest war, and she would be the Incumbent's shield-bearer. So she said to him one day, after a peculiarly joyous evening at Whitefield House, adding what she thought an irresistible argument, or rather inducement: "If you will give up Madame Floriani, my sisters and I will follow you." At which Mr. Bentley stammered and blushed; then sighed, and said nasally: "We must still hope for her conversion."

Apple-cheeked Mr. Bentley was unhappy. He began even to look so: which was somewhat difficult with that insignificant countenance of his. But apple-cheeked Mr. Bentley was in love. Disguise it as he might to himself and to others, deny it, scorn and reject it—it was none the less true—he was in love with Madame Floriani. True, she was a heathen; but then her

natural graces were so many! True, she was a woman of the world, an artist, a lover of frivolity—but then she was kind to the poor and so gentle in her temper! True, she was all that he most reprobated, all that he most abhorred; but then he loved her. What should he do? Marry her, and so lose his influence over the world he had governed so long? But should he lose his influence? The Grandvilles would be angry; perhaps they would leave Langthwaite—he wished they might; but he could manage all the rest. He should be rich too—very rich; and money always gives power. Mr. Bentley had no pious horror of that side of worldliness. Yes, on the whole he should be better off; even in Langthwaite. Yes, he would marry her.

These were his reasonings spread out over many days and weeks, during which time he was much at Whitefield House, often to Madame Rosa's great inconvenience and annoyance. And indeed of late she had adopted the habit of denying herself; an offence which took all Mr. Bentley's love to forgive. For it was a falsehood, he said; and worse—forcing her servants to lie for her. While Rosa only answered, "Mais, Monsieur l'Abbé, it is a thing seen—it is understood—everybody knows what it means when one says that madame is not at home, or does not receive to-day."

"In the world, that may be," said Mr. Bentley; "but we do not understand such fictions here."

"Monsieur l'Abbé! are you not the same here as anywhere else? What is there so peculiarly virtuous in Langthwaite that you must make laws for yourselves against all the rest of the world, and condemn all this rest of the world? You don't seem to think that there is any crime in pride and hatred and self-sufficiency and all that—only in happiness and gaiety of heart. It is monstrous!" cried Rosa, excited.

"Madame Floriani, I beg of you one favour, I have asked it before. Do not call me monsieur l'abbé. I am not a Romish priest but a Protestant minister," said Mr. Bentley gravely.

"Oh, pardon!" cried Rosa, with a toss of her graceful head and making that pretty little noise with her lips which you hear every Italian make when perplexed or dissatisfied. "Oh, pardon! It is so natural to me to call men of your profession abbés or curés, that I forget. I will try to remember."

"At least there is one great difference between us," said Mr. Bentley, turning very red.

"What do you mean?" asked the pretty widow tranquilly.

"Shall I tell you?" said the Incumbent, in a voice that was meant to be caressing.

"If you please," answered Rosa, nestling herself back in her easy chair and putting up her feet on a tabouret.

"I mean," said Mr. Bentley, after a short pause, and

making a desperate rush like a cart-horse at a fence; "I mean, that we Protestant clergy may marry, and the Romanist priest cannot."

"Yes, that is true; and I don't like married priests," said Rosa quietly.

"Why, Madame Floriani?" asked the Incumbent trembling.

"From association, I suppose. It is distasteful to me."

"Then you would not yourself——?" stammered Mr. Bentley.

"What?" and Rosa lifted up her eyes in astonishment at his voice.

"Marry a clergyman!" said Mr. Bentley with a kind of roar; and down he came on his knees, first seizing her hand.

Madame Floriani slowly raised herself from a reclining posture. She looked at the young Incumbent blushing and trembling on the ground before her; and gently drew away the hand he was holding between his own. And his own were so red! She was going to speak seriously; but—I am grieved to say it of Rosa who ought to have known better—the young man's apple-face and awkward attitude were so ludicrous—the remembrance of all his absurd attempts at solemnity and asceticism came so vividly in contrast with the ridicule and humiliation of his present position—

it was such an unlooked-for offer, and was made so clumsily—that her gravity gave way; and she burst into a fit of laughter.

It was very wrong and there was no excuse to be made for her; but the situation was very ridiculous—though she should not have laughed for all that. Mr. Bentley started up, seized his hat and umbrella—it was a glorious day in July, but Mr. Bentley patronized umbrellas—and rushed from the house; turning round at the door to say, angrily: "Your place shall know me no more, madame!"

And so war was finally declared, and Miss Augusta Grandville was satisfied. I doubt if she would have been as content if she had known the full particulars of the *casus belli*. Mr. Bentley said it was the hardened and impenetrable nature of Madame Floriani—how that he had sought to convert her, and she had answered him only with mockery—and Madame Floriani said nothing. She only laughed; and drew a certain sketch, which she showed to the Winter girls under the strictest vows of secresy. Which, to their honour be it said, they religiously kept. Though, when Helen Winter met Mr. Bentley the day after she had seen that drawing, she turned so red in trying to look grave, that Laura pinched her arm, and said: "Helen! don't be silly," below her breath.

The Bentleyites were the strongest. In a short

time Madame Rosa's Wednesday evenings were almost deserted. All the very good avoided her and her house as if a moral plague existed around her. The Misses Grandville, indeed, very nearly cut her. They scarcely bowed when they saw her, and passed her very stiffly even in church. Sometimes they were afflicted with sudden short-sightedness and did not see her at all. Miss Augusta, triumphant, could afford to be a little magnanimous. She was a shade less distant in her manner than was her sister; and when she was with Mrs. Bentley and they met the objectionable widow she was positively gracious. Then the Cantabs went back to their respective colleges, and the leaves began to fall. In the dreary autumn weather—the rain and fog and drizzling mist—that now came on, even her own adherents could not come out so often to see her; so that the sweet face grew sad in thinking of the bright sky and the warm hearts of Italy; and the joyous spirits sank in this social solitude, for want of love and sympathy to sustain it. The days were so grey and dark, she could not even paint; and in the Langthwaite lending library were only dull histories or biographies. The mud and the rain frightened the soft half-foreigner and kept her much within doors, moping in a dull Cumberland house where the clouds came down so low, they sometimes rested on the roof; and where the only visitors she saw were half a dozen

good-hearted country girls with not an idea amongst them beyond Berlin work or babies' caps. And, to a woman accustomed to the best and most intellectual society of Rome, this was scarcely sufficient mental distraction.

What was she to do?—fight or retire? She thought of Italy, of her friends there, of the treasures of art, of the beauty, the free life, the ease, the love, the fulness of existence—and she covered her face in her hands while tears forced their way through her fingers. Then she thought of Mr. Bentley and of his offer, and of how he looked when he was down on his knees before her; and she laughed till she had a pain in her side. But she could not laugh for ever at Mr. Bentley and his offer; and the ennui of her life began to grow insupportable. It was reported at last that she was going away. It was Laura Winter who said so first, by Rosa's permission, one day after she had been at Whitefield House. Madame Floriani had cried and said that she was ill. The constant damp did not agree with her; and she had grown very thin and sallow rather than soft and cream-coloured as she used to be; and she said, too, that she was dull; she could not bear it any longer. Her heart was Italian. It would not live in such an atmosphere. And then she had cried dreadfully; and Laura had cried too, for sympathy. As girls in the country always do.

So, Rosa owned herself beaten. Langthwaite morality had been too strong for her; and Langthwaite coldness too severe. Mr. Bentley had won the battle and she cared now only for her retreat. She packed up her pictures and her books, her statues and her blue silk curtains; advertised Whitefield House for sale, and sold it well too. A retired sugar-broker bought it, and furnished it in gold and velvet. He had not a picture, nor a bust, nor a book; but he had hangings that cost a small fortune, and an assortment of colours that must surely please some one, as none in the whole rainbow were absent. Rosa had nothing to do with this. All she cared for, was to get out of Langthwaite, and to leave Cumberland clouds for Italian sunshine. She went to make her farewell calls. And, after having kissed the Misses Grandville on both cheeks—for she was a generous, forgiving woman with a loving heart and a perfect temper and could not bear malice if she died for it—and after having shaken hands cordially with Mr. Bentley—who, like a foolish fat schoolboy, attempted to sulk—she turned her sweet face to the south, and left a climate that was killing her and a people who did not love her, for the beauty and graciousness of Italy.

But she left the seeds of discord behind her that soon bore deadly fruit. Deprived of their patroness, the Florianites sank to the ground. They were snubbed,

maltreated, slighted and all but extinguished. And when Miss Augusta Grandville at last got Mr. Bentley to consent to their marriage, not one of them was invited to the wedding. It was the day of retribution; and the Bentley faction were unsparing.

Madame Floriani did not forget her old adherents when she was established in her Roman home again; and after the Grandville marriage had turned out notoriously ill—for Miss Augusta was imperious and Mr. Bentley obstinate—she invited the two Winter girls to Rome, and actually sent a man-servant all the way down to Langthwaite to take care of them on their journey. Which royal act nearly canonized her, though Mrs. Bentley said it was ridiculous: "And, good gracious! could not those two girls take care of themselves?—if indeed they went at all; which, if they had been her sisters they should not have done!"

Madame Floriani was very kind to her old friends. She took them everywhere, and fêted and petted them beyond measure. Their soft, pretty English faces, with their bright cheeks and long fair ringlets, made a sensation among the dark eyes and raven locks at Rome. The Misses Winter were decidedly the belles of their society—which is a woman's state of paradise, and Madame Floriani set about marrying her young ladies according to her foreign notions. A task not very difficult; for foreigners like English wives because they can

trust them so much; and English women like foreign husbands because they are more polite than their own countrymen. So Madame Rosa married them both—one to a count and the other to a baron. And when they went back to Langthwaite, which they did for their wedding trip, the people called them my lord and my lady, and treated them like queens. Even Mrs. Bentley yielded the precedence; which was a marvellous distinction, and made up for a great deal of the past. After all then, Rosa had not entirely lost. The days of her teaching survived in her disciples, for Laura Winter settled at Langthwaite and remodelled society there after the Floriani system. And now that Mr. Bentley was married, of course his influence was lessened; and all the young ladies who had tried to touch his heart by their austerity, thought more of Laura's foreign friends who came to see her, and who thought life without innocent laughter not worth the living, than they did of their stupid little Incumbent, with his cross, big, uncomfortable wife.

TWO COUSINS.

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"He didn't care much about it," he said: "they might marry him, if they liked, and to whom they liked, provided he was not expected to make love. Give him his hookah and a volume of Shelley, and really, wife or no wife, it was almost the same thing to him. By the bye, one thing he must stipulate for—that she should not hunt nor talk slang."

This Launcelot Chumley said, yawning—although it was only twelve o'clock and he had not long finished breakfast—and after he had said this, sauntering from the drawing-room through the open window on to the lawn, he stretched himself under the shadow of the chestnut-trees to dream vague poems all the day after; a mode of existence that seemed to him to fulfil the sacred destiny of his being.

Launcelot Chumley was a spoilt child;—a spoilt child full of noble thoughts and generous impulses tarnished by prosperity and choked for want of stimulants to

exertion. He was also vain for want of wholesome opposition. Provided people left him alone, they might do as they liked, he used to say. Let them not disturb his books, nor cut down the chestnut-trees on the lawn, nor break his pipes, nor talk loud, nor make a noise—and he was perfectly satisfied. His indifference and indolence drove his mother to despair. She tried to tempt him to exertion by dazzling visions of distinction. But Launcelot prided himself on his want of ambition, and vowed he would not accept a dukedom if offered to him—it would be such a bore! His mother had indeed done her best to ruin him by unmitigated indulgence; and now she wrung her hands at her own work. But, as something must be done, she bethought herself of marriage; which, woman-like, she fancied would cure everything—indolence, vanity, selfishness at a blow.

Mrs. Chumley bethought her of a marriage—but with whom?

There were in London two Chumley cousins, Ella Limple and little Violet Tudor. These two young ladies were great friends after the fashion of young ladies in general. They had mysterious confidences together and wrote wonderful letters of great frequency and appalling length. Ella Limple, being of a pathetic and sentimental temperament, talked of sorrow and sadness, and said there was no more happiness for her on earth, there being something she could never forget;

though nobody knew what that something was. Violet Tudor, her bosom friend, laughed at all sentiment, and expressed a supreme contempt for lovers. She vowed also that she would never marry a less man than a Lion-king or a general who had seen severe service and been wounded badly; and then she did not know—perhaps she might. For Violet rode blood horses, and once pronounced an Indian officer a "muff," because he had never seen a tiger hunt:—an expression which caused that gentleman to feel the kind of anger which is, among his own sex, usually assuaged by a duel.

It may be imagined therefore that Mrs. Chumley did not place Miss Violet Tudor very high in her scale of feminine graces; although she did not know one half of that curly-headed gipsy's escapades. Consequently she was passed over at once. Ella was, on the contrary, all that Mrs. Chumley wished; young, pretty, mild, manageable; with gold, a stainless pedigree and unexceptionable manners. What more could any mother demand for her son? Wherefore, much to Ella's surprise and pleasure Mrs. Chumley sent by that day's post an affectionate invitation asking her to pass a week at High Ashgrove: for Cousin Launcelot had long been a kind of heroic myth to that young lady's imagination; and she was glad to be asked to be with him: "Though dearest Vi knows that nothing could make me forget poor dear Henry all alone in

those terrible East Indies!" she said in the letter which communicated the circumstance to her bosom friend. Out of gratitude then and full of poetic fancy, but, without dangerous designs, she accepted the invitation; and, in less than a week's time, she found herself at High Ashgrove, with all her prettiest dresses and her last new bonnet.

Ella's correspondence with Violet Tudor marvellously multiplied during this visit. The early letters were gay, for her; but soon they deepened into a nameless melancholy, and were rife with mysterious hints. Occasionally there burst forth in them the most terrific self-accusings that English words could frame. If she had become the head of a society of coiners, or the high priestess of a heresy, she could not have used stronger expressions of guilt. At first Violet was frightened; but then she remembered that it was Ella's habit to indulge in all sorts of exaggerated self-accusations and so calmed herself and even smiled. At last came a letter which unveiled the mystery; reducing the terrible sphynx which devoured men's bones to a tame dog that stole his neighbour's cream—the usual ending of most young ladies' mysteries. "I do not know what my dearest Violet will think of her Ella," she said, "but if it is to be the death-blow of that long and tender love which has supported my sad heart through so many bitter trials, I must tell her the truth. Violet,

I have broken by vows, and am deserving of the fate of Imogen in that dreadful ballad! Poor dear Henry! Violet, love, I am engaged to my cousin Launcelot. My aunt made me the offer so supplicatingly, and Launcelot said so sweetly: 'I think you will make me a very nice wife, Miss Limple,' that I could not resist. Besides, Cousin Lancelot is very handsome; and that goes a great way. You know I always found fault with poor dear Henry's figure; he was inclined to be too stout. Launcelot's figure is perfect. He is tall—six feet I should think—and with the most graceful manners possible. He is like a picture; has very bright brown hair, all in thick curls, not short and close like poor dear Henry's. He wears them very long, like the portraits of Raphael. Henry's hair, poor darling, was inclined to be red. His eyes are large and dark grey, with *such* a beautiful expression of melancholy in them. They are poems in themselves, Violet. Now Henry's, you know, were hazel; and hazel eyes are unpleasant—they are so quick and fiery. I like such eyes as Launcelot's—melancholy, poetic eyes that seem to feel and think as well as to see. Hazel eyes only see. Don't you know the difference? He is very quiet; lies all day under the trees smoking out of the most exquisite hookah, and reading Shelley. I dote on Shelley and hate Shakespeare. How fond Henry was of Shakespeare!—that wearisome Hamlet! And now

her own Ella is going to beg and pray of her dearest Violet to come here as soon as possible. I enclose a note from Aunt Chumley, asking you; and, darling Vi. I will never forgive you if you do not come directly. For no lover in the world could ever separate me from my own Violet. If you do not come I shall think you are angry with me for my bad conduct to poor Henry; and indeed I feel how guilty I am. I had such a terrible dream of him last night! I thought he looked so pale and reproachful, just like his favourite Hamlet. Good-bye. I cannot write another word; for aunt wants me to go with her to the village. Do come, dearest Violet, and come immediately."

This letter delighted Ella's friend. She had never liked the flirtation with Cornet Henry Dampier which she had thought silly and sentimental; while this seemed to offer a real future. She wrote to her aunt—of whom she was considerably afraid; and in a few days she also arrived at High Ashgrove. She was received by Ella with a burst of enthusiasm, which, coming from one so calm as his quiet little *fiancée*, quite electrified Launcelot; by Aunt Chumley with no superfluity of kindness; and, by Launcelot himself, with a cold bow. Yet Violet was pretty enough for any man's admiration. The thick raven hair which it was her will and pleasure to wear crowded over her face; her great black eyes that never rested; her tiny

hand; her fabulous waist; her light fairy figure; her wide red lips, and her untamable vivacity, made her appear like some wild child of the desert as she alighted on the steps of that still, lazy, gentlemanlike house.

For the first two days Violet behaved herself with perfect propriety. She embroidered more than two square inches of Berlin work and did not make a single allusion to the stables. She fell asleep only twice when Launcelot condescended to read aloud the mistiest parts of Queen Mab; and she tried hard to look as if she understood what Epipsychidion was all about. Poor little woman! She knew as much about either as if Cousin Launce, as she called him, had informed her in its native dialect of the glory of the Anax Andrôn, or as if he had told her how "arms and the man" were sung at Mantua long ago. But this state of things could not last long. Old habits and old instincts entered their protest, and Violet Tudor felt that she must be natural or she should die. Launcelot said that she was noisy and made his head ache; and he changed his resting-place for one farther off from the house, complaining of Miss Tudor's voice which he declared was like a bird's whistle that penetrated into his brain. This he said to his mother languidly, at the same time asking when she was going away again.

"You don't keep horses, Cousin Launce?" Violet said on the third morning at breakfast, raising her eyelids and fixing her eyes for an instant on him.

"Not for ladies, Miss Tudor," said Launcelot.

"Why do you call me Miss Tudor?" she asked again. "I am your own cousin. It is rude!"

"I should think myself impertinent if I called you by any other name," returned Launcelot still more coldly.

"How odd! Aunt, why is Cousin Launce so strange?"

"I don't know what you mean, Violet," said Mrs. Chumley a little sternly; "I think *you* are strange—not my son!"

An answer that steadied the eyes for some time; for Violet looked down, feeling rebuked and wondering how she had deserved rebuke. A moment after, Ella asked Launcelot for something in her gentle, quiet, unintoned voice, speaking as if they had been strangers and had met for the first time that day. It was a striking contrast; and not unnoticed by Chumley, who was inwardly thankful that such a quiet wife had been chosen for him—adding a grace of thanks for having escaped Violet Tudor. After breakfast he strolled, as usual, into the garden—Mrs. Chumley going about her household concerns. Violet went to the door, turning round for Ella.

"Come with me, Elly darling," she said; "let us go and tease Launce. It is really too stupid here!—I cannot endure it much longer. I want to see what that

lazy fellow is really made of. *I* am not engaged to him, so I am not afraid of him. Come!" And with one spring down the whole flight, she dashed on the lawn like a flash of light. Ella descended like a well-bred lady; but Violet skipped and ran and jumped and once she hopped—until she found herself by Launcelot's side as he lay on the grass, darting in between him and the sun like a humming-bird.

"Cousin Launce, how lazy you are!" were her first words. "Why don't you do something to amuse us? You take no more notice of Ella than if she were a stranger, and you are not even ordinarily polite to me. It is really dreadful! What will you be when you are a man, if you are so idle and selfish now? There will be no living with you in a few years; for I am sure you are almost insupportable as you are!"

Launcelot had not been accustomed to this style of address, and for the first few moments was completely at fault. Ella looked frightened. She touched Violet, and whispered: "Don't hurt his feelings!" as if he had been a baby and Violet an assassin.

"And what am I to do to please Miss Tudor?" Launcelot asked in an impertinent voice; "what herculean exertion must I go through to win favour in the eyes of my strong, brave, manly young lady cousin?"

"Be a man yourself, Cousin Launce," answered Violet; "don't spend all your time dawdling over

stupid poetry, which I am sure you don't understand. Take exercise—good strong exercise. Ride, hunt, shoot, take interest in something and in some one, and don't think yourself too good for everybody's society but your own. You give up your happiness for pride; I am sure you do; yet, you are perfectly unconscious of how ridiculous you make yourself."

"You are severe, Miss Tudor," said Launcelot, his face crimson. Though Violet was so small and so pretty he could not help being dreadfully angry with her.

"I tell you the truth," she persisted; "and you don't often hear the truth. Better for you if you did. You must not let it be a quarrel between us; for I speak only for your own good; and if you will only condescend to be a little more like other men I will never say a word to you again. Let us go to the stables. I want to see your horses. You have horses?"

"Yes," said Launcelot coldly; "but, as I remarked at breakfast, not ladies' horses?"

"I don't care for ladies' horses: men's horses will suit me better!" said Violet, with a toss of her little head that was charming in its assertion of equality. "I would undertake to ride horses, Cousin Launce, which you dare not mount; for I am sure you cannot be good at riding, lying on the grass all your life!"

Launcelot was excessively piqued. His burning blood made his face tingle, his brows contracted, and

he felt humbled and annoyed; but roused. Tears came into Ella's eyes. She went up to her friend and said: "Oh, Violet, how cruel you are!"

Launcelot saw this little bye-scene. He was a vain man and a spoilt child in one; and he hated pity on the one side as much as interference on the other. So poor Ella did not advance herself much in his eyes by her championship. On the contrary, he felt more humiliated by her tears than by Violet's rebukes; and, drawing himself up proudly, he said to Violet as if he were giving away a kingdom, "If you please we will ride to-day."

"Bravo! bravo, Cousin Launce!" she cried gaily; and then left the lovers together, hoping they would improve the opportunity; but Ella was too well-bred, and Launcelot was too cold for the improvement of opportunities; and they only called each other Miss Limple and Mr. Chumley, and observed that it was very fine weather—which was the general extent of their love-making.

They arrived at the stable in time to hear some of Violet's candid criticisms. "That cob's off-fetlock wants looking to. The stupid groom! who ever saw a beast's head tied up like that? Why he isn't a crib-biter, is he?" she said; and with a: "Wo-ho, poor fellow! steady there, steady!" Violet went dauntlessly up to the big carriage-horse's head, and loosened the

strain of his halter before Launcelot knew what she was about. In the stable she was in her element. She wandered in and out of the stalls, and did not mind how much the horses fidgeted; nor, even if they turned themselves sideways as if they meant to crush her against the manger. Launcelot thought all this vulgar beyond words; and he thought Ella Limple, who stood just at the door and looked frightened, infinitely the superior of the two ladies; and he again thanked his good star that had risen on Ella and not on Violet.

Violet chose the biggest and the most spirited horse of the lot for her mount, Ella an old grey that was as steady as a camel; and both went into the house to dress for their ride. When they came back, even Launcelot—disapproving of Amazons in general—could not but confess that they made a beautiful pair; —Ella so fair and graceful, and Violet so full of life and beauty! He was obliged to allow that she was beautiful; but of course not so beautiful as Ella. With this thought he threw himself cleverly into the saddle, and off the three started; Ella holding her pummel very tightly.

They ambled down the avenue together; but, when they got a short distance on the road, Violet raised herself in the saddle and, waving her small hand lost in its white gauntlets, darted off; tearing along the road

till she became a mere speck in the distance. Launcelot's blood again came up into his face. Something stirred his heart, strung his nerves up to their natural tone, and made him envy and long and hate and admire all in a breath.

He turned to Ella and said hurriedly: "Shall we ride faster, Miss Limple?"

"If you please," answered Ella timidly: "but I cannot ride *very* fast, you know."

Launcelot bit his lip. "Oh, I remember;—yet I hate to see women riding like jockeys; you are quite right," he said. All the same he fretted his horse and frowned. Then he observed very loudly: "Violet Tudor is a very vulgar little girl."

After a time Violet came back; her black horse foaming, his head well up, his neck arched, his large eyes wild and bright: she, flushed, animated, bright, full of life and health. Launcelot sat negligently on his bay—one hand on the crupper as lazy men do sit on horseback—walking slowly. Ella's dozing gray was hanging down his head half asleep, with the flies settling on his twinkling pink eyelids.

"Dearest Violet, I thought you would have been killed," said Ella; "what made you rush off at that dreadful pace?"

"And what makes you both ride as if you were in a procession and were afraid of trampling on the

crowd?" retorted Violet. "Cousin Launcelot, you are something wonderful! A strong man like you to ride in that manner. Are you made of jelly that would break if shaken? For shame! Have a canter. Your bay won't beat my black; although my black is blown and your mare is fresh."

She gave her cousin's bay a smart cut with her whip which sent it off at a hand gallop. Away they both flew, clattering along the hard road, like dragoons. But Violet beat by a full length; or, as she phrased it, "she won cleverly;" telling Launcelot that he had a great deal to do yet before he could ride against her—which made him hate her as much as if she had been a Frenchman, or a Cossack; and love Ella more than ever. And so he told his *fiancée*, as he lifted her tenderly from her grey, leaving Violet to spring from her black mammoth unassisted.

All that evening he was sulky to Violet and peculiarly affectionate to Ella; making the poor child's heart flutter like a caged bird.

"Cousin," whispered Violet the next morning, laying her little hand on his shoulder; "have you a rifle in the house?—or a pair of pistols?" Launcelot was so taken by surprise that he hurriedly confessed to having guns and pistols and rifles and all other murderous weapons necessary for the fit equipment of a gentleman.

"We will have some fun, then," she said, looking happy and full of mischief.

She and Ella—Ella dragged sorely against her will: for the very sight of a pistol nearly threw her into hysterics—went into the shrubbery; and there Violet challenged Launcelot to shoot with her at a mark at twenty paces; then, as she grew vain, at thirty. Launcelot was too proud to refuse this challenge; believing of course that a little black-eyed girl, whose waist he could span between his thumb and little finger and with hands that could hardly find gloves small enough for them, could not shoot so well as he.

Launcelot was nervous—that must be confessed; and Violet was excited. Launcelot's nervousness helped in his failure but Violet's excitement helped her success. Her bullet hit the mark every time straight in the centre, and Launcelot never hit once; which was not very pleasant in their respective conditions of lord and subject; for so Launcelot classed men and women—especially little women with small waists—in his own magnificent mind.

"He had not shot for a long time," he said; "and he was out of practice. He drank coffee for breakfast, and that had made his hand unsteady."

"And confess too, Cousin Launce," said Violet, "that you were never very good at shooting any time of your life, without coffee or with it. Why, you don't

even load properly; how can you shoot if you don't know how to load? We can't read without an alphabet!" In the prettiest manner possible she took the pistol from her cousin's hand and loaded it for him—first drawing his charge. "Now try again!" she said, speaking as if to a child; "nothing like perseverance."

Launcelot was provoked, but subdued. He did as his little instructress bade him; to fail, once more. His bullet went wide of the target, and Violet's lodged in the bull's eye. So Launcelot flung the pistols on the grass and said: "It is a very unladylike amusement, Miss Tudor; and I was much to blame to encourage you in such nonsense." Offering his arm to Ella, he walked sulkily away.

Violet looked after them both for some time, watching them through the trees. There was a peculiar expression in her face—a mixture of whimsical humour, of pain, of triumph, and of a wistful kind of longing, of which she was half unconscious. She then turned away; and with a sigh, said softly to herself: "It is a pity Cousin Launcelot has such a bad temper!"

After this, Launcelot became more and more reserved to Violet and more and more affectionate to Ella; although he often wondered at himself for thinking so much of the one—though only in anger and dislike—and so little of the other. Why should he disturb himself about Violet?

On the other hand Violet was distressed at Launcelot's evident dislike for her. What had she said? What had she done? She was always good-tempered to him, and ready to oblige. To be sure she had told him several rough truths; but was not the truth always to be told? And just see the good that she had done him! Look how much more active and less spoilt he was now than he used to be! It was all owing to her. She wished, for Ella's sake, that he liked her better; for it would be very disagreeable for Ella when she married, if Ella's husband did not like to see her in his house. It was really very distressing. And Violet cried on her pillow that night, thinking over the dark future when she could not stay with Ella, because Ella's husband hated her.

This was after Violet had beaten Cousin Launcelot three games of chess consecutively. Launcelot had been furiously humiliated; for he was accounted the best chess-player of the neighbourhood. But Violet was really a good player, and had won the prize at a chess club where she had been admitted by extraordinary courtesy; it not being the custom of that reputable institution to suffer womanhood within its sacred walls. But she was very unhappy about Cousin Launce for all that; and the next day looked quite pale and cast down. Even Launcelot noticed his obnoxious cousin's changed looks and asked her, rather

graciously: "If she were ill?" To which question Violet replied by a blush, a glad smile bursting out like a song and a pretty pout: "No, I am not ill, thank you," she said half shyly. Which ended their interchange of civilities for the day.

Launcelot became restless, feverish, melancholy, cross; at times boisterously gay, at times the very echo of despair. He was kind to Ella and confessed to himself how fortunate he was in having chosen her; but he could not understand—knowing how much he loved her—the extraordinary effect that she had on his nerves. Her passiveness irritated him. Her soft and musical voice made him nervous; for he was incessantly watching for a change of intonation or an emphasis which never came. Her manners were certainly the perfection of manners—he desired none other in his wife—but, if she would sometimes move a little quicker, or look interested and pleased when he tried to amuse her, she would make him so much happier! And oh! if she would only do something more than work those eternal slippers, how glad he would be!

"There they are!" he exclaimed aloud, as the two cousins passed before his window. "By Jove, what a foot that Violet has!—and her hair, what a lustrous black it is!—and what eyes! Pshaw! what is it to me what kind of hair or eyes she has?" He closed his window and turned away. But, in a minute after, he

was watching the two girls again, seeing only Violet. "The strange strength of hate," he said, as he stepped out on the lawn to follow them.

Launcelot's life was very different now from what it had been. He wondered at himself. He had become passionately fond of riding and was looking forward to the hunting season with delight. He rode every day with his two cousins; and he and Violet had races together, which made them sometimes leave Ella and her grey for half an hour in the lanes. He used to shoot too—practising secretly—until one day he astonished Violet by hitting the bull's eye as often as she herself could hit it. He talked a great deal more than before; and he had not opened Shelley for a fortnight. He was more natural and less vain; and sometimes he even condescended to laugh so as to be heard, and to appreciate Violet Tudor's fun. But this was very rare; and always had the appearance of a condescension—as when men talk to children. He still hated Violet; and they quarrelled every day regularly, but were seldom apart. They hated each other so much that they could not be happy without bickering:—although, to do Violet justice, it was all on Launcelot's side. Left to herself, she would never have said a cross word to him. But what could she do when he was so impertinent? Thus they rode and shot and played at chess and quarrelled and sulked and became

reconciled and quarrelled again; and Ella, still and calm, looked on with her soft blue eyes and often "wondered why they were such children together."

One day, the three found themselves together on a bench under a fine old purple beech which bent down its great branches like a bower about them. Ella gathered a few of the most beautiful leaves and placed them in her hair. They did not look very well; her hair was too light; and Launcelot said so.

"Perhaps they will look better on you, Miss Tudor," he added, picking a broad and ruddy leaf and laying it Bacchante fashion on her curly, thick black bands. His hand touched her cheek. He started and dropped the leaf as suddenly as if that round fresh face had been burning iron. Violet blushed deeply, and felt distressed, ashamed and angry. Trembling, and with a strange difficulty of breathing, she got up and ran away; saying that she was going for her parasol—although she had it in her hand—and would be back immediately. But she stayed away a long time, wondering at Cousin Launcelot's impertinence. When she came back no one was to be seen. Ella and Launcelot had gone into the shubbery to look after a hare that had run across the path; and Violet sat down on the bench waiting for them—and very pleased they had gone. She heard a footstep. It was Launcelot without his cousin. "Ella had gone into the house," he said; "not quite under-

standing that Miss Tudor was coming back to the seat."

Violet instantly rose; a kind of terror was in her face, and she trembled more than ever. "I must go and look for her," she said, taking up her parasol.

"I am sorry, Miss Tudor, that my presence is so excessively disagreeable to you!" Launcelot said, moving aside to let her pass.

Violet looked full into his face, trembling no more. "Disagreeable! Your presence disagreeable to me? Why, Cousin Launce, it is *you* who hate *me!*"

"You know the contrary," said Launcelot hurriedly. "You detest and despise me: and take no pains to hide your feelings—not ordinary cousinly pains! I know that I am full of faults," speaking as if a dam had been removed and the waters were rushing over in a torrent —"but still I am not so bad as you think me! I have done all I could to please you since you have been here. I have altered my former habits. I have adopted your advice and followed your example. If I knew how to make you esteem me, I would try even more than I have already tried. I can endure anything rather than the humiliating contempt that you feel for me!"

Launcelot became suddenly afflicted with a choking sensation; a sense of fulness was in his head, and his limbs shook. Suddenly tears came into his eyes. Yes, man as he was, he wept. Violet flung her arms

round his neck; and took his head between her little hands. She bent her face till her breath came warm on his forehead, and spoke a few innocent words which might have been said to a brother. But they conjured up a strange world in both. Violet tried to disengage herself; for it was Launcelot now who held her. She hid her face; but he forced her to look up.

Suddenly, as if conquered by something stronger than herself, she flung her arms again round his neck; then with a little cry and a spasmodic effort she tore herself away and darted into the house in a state of excitement and tumult.

An agony of reflection succeeded to this agony of feeling; and Launcelot and Violet both felt as if they had committed or were about to commit some fearful sin. Could Violet betray her friend? Could she, who had always upheld truth and honour, accept Ella's trust only to deprive her of her lover? It was worse than guilt! Poor Violet wept the bitterest tears which her bright eyes had ever shed; for she laboured under a sense of sin that was insupportable. She dared not look at Ella, but feigned a headache and went into her own room to weep. Launcelot was shocked too; but Launcelot was a man; and the sense of a half-developed triumph somewhat deadened his sense of remorse. A certain dim unravelling of the mystery of the past was also pleasant. Without being dishonourable, he was less overcome.

On that dreadful day Launcelot and Violet spoke no more to each other. They did not even look at each other. Ella thought that some new quarrel had burst forth in her absence, and tried to make it up between them, in her amiable way. But ineffectually. Violet rushed away when Launcelot came near her; and she besought of Ella to leave her alone so pathetically, that the poor girl, bewildered, only sighed at her inability to harmonize the two greatest loves of her life.

The day after, Violet received a letter from her mother, in which that poor woman, having had an attack of spasms in her chest and being otherwise out of sorts, expressed her firm belief that she should never see her sweet child again. The dear old lady consequently bade her adieu resignedly. On ordinary days Violet would have known what all this pathos meant; now she was glad to turn it to account and to appear to believe it. She spoke to her aunt and to Ella, and told them that she must absolutely leave by the afternoon train—poor mamma was ill and she could not let her be nursed by servants. There was nothing to oppose to this argument, and Mrs. Chumley ordered the brougham to take her to the station precisely at two o'clock. Launcelot was not in the room when these arrangements were made; nor did he know anything that was taking place until he came down to luncheon, pale and haggard, to find Violet in her travelling dress standing by her boxes.

"What is all this, Violet?" he cried, taken off his guard and seizing her hands as he spoke.

"I am going away," said Violet as quietly as she could; but without looking at him.

He started as if an electric shock had passed through him. "Violet—going!" he cried in a suffocated voice. He was pale; and his hands, clasped on the back of the chair, were white with the strain. "Going? Why?"

"Mamma is ill," said Violet. It was all she could say.

"I am sorry we are to lose you," he then said very slowly—each word as if ground from him, as words are ground out, when they are the masks of intense passion.

His mother looked at him with surprise. Ella turned to Violet. Every one felt there was a mystery of which they knew nothing. Ella went up to her cousin.

"Dear Violet, what does all this mean?" she asked, her arm round the little one's neck caressingly.

"Nothing," answered Violet with great difficulty. "There is nothing."

Big drops stood on Launcelot's forehead. "Ought you not to write first to your mother—to give her notice before you go?" he said.

"No," she answered, her flushed face quivering from brow to lip; "I must go now."

At that moment a servant entered hurriedly to say that she must go at once if she wished to catch the

train. Adieux were given in all haste. Violet's tears began to gather—but only to gather as yet; not to flow—kept bravely back for love and pride. "Good-bye," she said to Ella, warmly, tenderly, her heart filled with self-reproach. "Good-bye," she said to aunt: aunt herself very sad; and then "Good-bye," she said to Launcelot. "Good-bye, Mr. Chumley," she repeated, holding out her hand, but not looking into his face. He could not speak. He tried to bid her adieu; but his lips were dry and his voice would not come. His features expressed such exquisite suffering that Violet for a moment was overcome, and could scarcely draw away her hand. The hour struck; and duty ranked before all with brave Violet. Launcelot stood where she left him. She ran down the lawn; she was almost out of sight, when "Violet! Violet!" rang from the house like the cry of death.

Violet—a moment irresolute—returned; then almost unconsciously she found herself kneeling beside Launcelot, who lay senseless on the ground, saying: "Launcelot, I will not leave you!"

The burden of pain was shifted now. From Launcelot and Violet to Ella. But Ella—sentimental and conventional as she might be—was a girl who, like many, can perform great sacrifices with an unruffled brow; who can ice over their lives, and suffer without expression; who can consume their sorrows inwardly—the world the while believing them happy.

Many years after—when her graceful girlhood had waned into a faded womanhood and when Launcelot had become an active country gentleman and Violet a staid wife—Ella lost her sorrows, and came to her peace in the love of a disabled Indian officer whom she had known many years ago—and whose sunset days she made days of warmth and joy; persuading herself, and him too, that the Cornet Dampier, with whom she had flirted when a girl, she had always loved as a woman and had never forgotten for any other fancy.

MARIE'S FEVER.

MARIE'S FEVER.

Prayers to the Holy Virgin; wax candles to Saint Joseph; rosaries and litanies for the poor little heretic, sick unto death! All the Quartier Saint Honoré was interested in the young English girl lying there so ill and lonely, without a friend, with no known finances, without a home in the world, and, as those Catholic hearts believed, without a home in the house of Heaven —Protestant heretic that she was! There was something too, in the fever itself that touched the French heart keenly. For a certain romantic interest was connected with it which gave it just that amount of dramatic character without which death is dull and fevers tame in some countries.

Marie and her younger sister Emilie were orphans. Their mother had died when Emilie was born; and their father had been one of the victims of cholera about two years before this story opens. They had not a relation in France. Mr. Maconnel had emigrated, on

account of an unlucky bankruptcy, just before Emilie's birth; and all intercourse with England had gradually ceased, although he had relations there, both rich and childless:—especially an old uncle, who had no one but a parrot and a housekeeper to whom to leave his money. However, for any good they did the orphans, all these relations might have been buried in Brian O'Lin's cave with his sheepskins and his turnips. Old Hugh Maconnell, especially, would have been as useful to his generation if lost among the "good people" as he was now when buried in his avarice and his wealth, living alone, with his screaming gray parrot and his buxom housekeeper—with cherry ribbons in her cap.

They were quite alone in France, these two girls of nineteen and twenty-one; with no one to protect, to guide, or to aid them; cast rudderless on the rough waves of the world for storms to wreck and winds to perish. And, at the time of Marie's fever, they were even separated from each other; for Emilie was at Marseilles as governess with Madame de Lamotte.

Marie had never been a favourite with her father. On the contrary, he rather disliked her than not. Emilie was a mild gentle tractable creature, the model "little lady" who would "sit good" for hours without stirring, and who, with a piece of embroidery or a book, would neither distract nor seek for distraction: while Marie, all

life, animation, vehemence and restlessness, was like a caged hawk or clogged zebra when set to any still employment or obliged to be quiet and well-bred. Her father used to punish her by making her sit on a chair near the door, sometimes for two hours, sometimes for three; and Marie's frantic paroxysms during the time were a little like madness. They used to frighten Mr. Maconnell sometimes; then, the rest of the sentence would be remitted and another punishment substituted; but Marie took nothing to heart so deeply as this torture of the chair near the door. She was the prettier of the two sisters; but her large black eyes and long thick raven hair worked no spell on her father who was never kind to her and was sometimes really brutal. She teased him. She drove him nearly mad and made him wish she was dead. Her wildness and restlessness were perpetual tortures to him—the stern cold man of secret passions and unexceptionable appearances—and her innocence and frankness nearly destroyed his reputation more than once. Marie was one of those terrible people who see everything, understand nothing and speak of all; one of those people who practically apply the moral lessons which they have received, and cannot seize the distinction between arbitary and convenient virtues. Anything which Mr. Maconnell wished to conceal—and there was much to conceal in his Parisian life—Marie was sure to discover and sure to publish;

not dreaming of the possibility of wrong, and detailing the most compromising circumstances as frankly if she had been giving the recipe for a pudding. Miss Henrietta, their governess, was obliged to leave after a time, owing to Marie's mentioning such terrible facts that their neighbours of the Quartier Saint Honoré were scandalized at the English father's want of "*convenance*." Marie never knew why her father beat her and called her a viper. She flung herself on her knees and asked pardon both of her father and of the governess; but as ignorantly as she had given offence —blundering through her sobs. She kept her sister awake all night, trying to find out what she had said that was wrong. Emilie at last told her, yawning, that she talked too much and had better go to sleep. The next governess managed better. She used to lock up Marie as she would some dangerous animal. Consequently, those big black eyes saw nothing, and Madame Certost kept her place for a long time. But then she was a French woman and very discreet.

Yet in spite of all this physical wildness and energy of temperament, Marie was timid, shy and loving; requiring indulgence and encouragement as well as guidance. She was unfitted, above all things, for her father's harsh discipline. She was inquisitive because she was restless and unemployed, not because she was sly: frank because she was guileless, not

because she was bold: she told all she knew because she never dreamt of evil; and she could not understand the value of caution because she could not understand the necessity for concealment. She desired ardently to be loved, and she lived under a ban; she desired earnestly to be good, and she was met by condemnation. Her younger sister was held up to her as a model, and was warned against her example. Blindly searching to know her sins, and in that search committing them, poor little Marie often wished that she was dead; and wondered how such a monster was suffered to live.

From this unhealthy state, Marie, having completed her education at home, was sent to Madame Dupuy, as governess to her youngest child. It was her first step of comparative freedom.

Madame Dupuy was a very fascinating woman; not pretty, but graceful and exceedingly well-bred. Rather too lithe perhaps in her gestures, and too flattering in her manners. Her morals were strict and her ideas of female propriety exalted; yet her power of extracting queer confidences was something wonderful, for almost all who knew her made her the depository of their most dangerous secrets. But at heart she was cold and selfish, and never made a step in life without forecast and calculation—her own advantage her only rule of right or wrong. Still, with her sweet manners, prudent principles, and great powers of personal fasina-

tion, she was an admirable person to take charge of Marie; and she promised Mr. Maconnell to reform her. Poor Marie! it was little enough of reformation that the heedless, innocent child needed.

Madame Dupuy kept her word. She worked a kind of miracle with the girl and changed her into another creature. For the first time in her life, Marie heard the voice of affection and respect. For the first time she was treated with indulgence and for the first time her nature was understood. Madame Dupuy played her part to perfection, and won all for which she played. Conquered by love, Marie became her slave, and poured out the riches of her loving heart prodigally. She would have undergone an arduous self-discussion before refusing to commit even a crime at Madame Dupuy's order; so nearly had she merged the landmarks of right and wrong in her love. How happy she was! No one but a girl unloved at home could rightly understand the excess of Marie's passionate happiness under the gentle treament of her mistress. It was idolatry. It was an infinite devotion without name or term: the full perfection of that childlike effusion which comes but once in life, for the first friend, the first lover, and is never equalled again, even for husband or for child.

M. le Comte Dupuy was an elderly man without moral perceptions; excepting one; the respect due to a demoiselle. Marie Maconnell was young, pretty,

motherless and confided to him; and M. Dupuy looked on her as a kind of religious deposit, which, if he lost, would leave him an uncomfortable time in purgatory. He was therefore very strict with her, both as regarded himself and every one else. He might have been the Saint Père of Rome, or a Carthusian Monk, for anything bordering on levity of speech or conduct to Marie; although he was known as a man with no more real virtue than Tartuffe. He might have been a gaoler of the Inquisition, and she its pet heretic, for any undue liberty allowed to her. Marie must have been clever indeed to have escaped the Count's care. He nailed down the jalousie blinds of her window so that she could not raise them; he locked the door of her room whenever he went out, and took the key with him, not trusting even the concierge. Her bedroom door too was locked every night, and the key laid on Madame Dupuy's table: and, when in Paris, she was never suffered to go even into the garden alone. Marie thought him harsh, and complained of him to his wife; but Madame Dupuy said he had reason, and Marie must submit. Marie did submit but a little, grumblingly. M. Dupuy was not only harsh: he was uncertain too. Sometimes Marie was a crow, a cow, a stick, a stupid; and then she was his dear little friend, his child, his little love of a saint: and, once or twice—but not often—his little cabbage and his rabbit. Whereat Marie

used to wonder, and ask Madame Dupuy why the Count was first so cross, and then so kind?

Madame Dupuy—a woman who never deceived herself by imagination, and never lost the clue to a truth by over indulgent interpretation—was a keen observer. She believed in virtue as little as in her husband. She saw clearly enough the riddle which Marie could not explain and read every letter of it as if it had been the nursery hornbook. But she was not jealous. At least not yet. Marie was useful to her for another year; then, she would require a more advanced governess for her girl; at present, jealousy would have been a folly—and Madame Dupuy never committed a folly. She told Marie that it was M. le Comte's way; and asked her if he did not treat her, his wife, even more unkindly? Which was true enough; for they led a most unhappy life, and quarrelled twelve hours out of the twenty-four.

While these two volcanoes slumbered beneath Marie's tread, her father died, and Emilie went down to Marseilles with Madame de Lamotte. Marie was then thrown entirely into the power of the Dupuys who gradually assumed a control over her, scarcely inferior to her father's in harshness. Madame Dupuy changed the most thoroughly. She became cold and severe and scolded incessantly. If Marie worked, the stitches were called "cat's eyes" and must be undone; if she

read, it was idleness—why could she not do something useful? If she went into the garden—this was in the country—it was an assignation; and if she sat in her own room, she was sullen or perhaps she was writing a love-letter—although, as Marie said, lovers do not spring up like mushrooms, and, excepting M. le Curé, there was no one either at the château, or for miles round. But it was Madame Dupuy's intention to be unreasonable. In truth, she was tired of Marie's wild and somewhat tactless devotion, and she had gradually become jealous of her husband's evident love: although she knew that Marie neither returned nor suspected this love. Marie tried not to see this change. She called herself hard names for even fancying that Madame Dupuy could be unjust; and said to the Curé that she was the most ungrateful creature under heaven. But the Curé, who had keen eyes too, told her that she ought to be more measured in her self-accusations, and that people must be just to themselves as well as to others. Advice which Marie thought neither good nor true; being still too blinded to understand the real value of the marshlight glare that had bewildered her.

At the château in the country where they lived was a certain avenue on one side of the house; at the end whereof was an arbour hidden deep among the trees. This was Marie's favourite hiding-place; for, since

Madame Dupuy had been so changed to her, much of her old savage love of loneliness and many of her old reckless ways had come back. No threats and no coercion could keep her always in the house, now that her patrons were so unkind and unjust. One day she had been hidden in this arbour for a long time, when M. Dupuy and his little daughter Louise came in. It was a beautiful summer day, still and breathless, and the cool shade of the alley and the arbour made a very Eden under the glowing sky. Marie—her eyes fixed on the earth, and her raven hair flung from her face—sat lost in a state of dreamy feeling rather than of thought—a vague half painful sentiment of something wanting mingling with a delicious consciousness of happiness in youth and beauty and life and hope. A state of feeling not unusual to girlhood; especially to girlhood in the country.

M. Dupuy sat down by Marie. Louise seated herself on a stone by the entrance. A book was in her hand, and she appeared to read it.

"I have forbidden you to sit here alone, mademoiselle," began the Count with a bow and a shrug, and an apologetic wave of his hand.

"It was so hot, monsieur, in the house; and the children made a noise. I wanted to be alone."

"It is not proper, mademoiselle, for a young person like you to be alone."

"Why, monsieur?" she asked dreamily.

"Because, mademoiselle, some one might come in here to see you."

"My faith, monsieur! There is no one to come!" cried Marie with a half pout. "Perhaps I should like it if some one did come!"

"Mademoiselle! Do you know what you have said?"

"Yes," said Marie, shaking her thick hair like a lion's mane. "I said I should perhaps be glad if any one did come in here to see me. Any stranger, I mean, It is so sad to see the same faces always!"

"Miserable child! Will you force me to lock you in your room like a criminal? Must you be chained like a slave to propriety?"

"Lock me up in my room again, monsieur? What have I done? You locked me up yesterday because I talked to Monsieur le Curé by the water-side; although he gave me good counsel and told me to obey you."

"You wish to ruin yourself, mademoiselle. That wild English blood of yours renders you unmanageable and makes you revolt against all laws of propriety. But I must step in between you and your own hand, and preserve you in spite of yourself."

The count was sometimes seized with sentimental attacks. He had one to-day.

"Thank you, monsieur," said Marie. "I can take care of myself."

"You are presumptuous, child."

"And you, Monsieur le Comte, vex me!"

"Do not vex yourself, my rabbit. You really become too beautiful!" There was a deep rich glow on Marie's cheek, and such a baby boldness of displeasure in her large eyes, that the count could not scold her any longer. He took her hand. Marie, who regarded him as her father, suffered her hand to remain in his. The count kissed it. Louise looked up. "How droll!" she said to herself. "I wonder what mamma would say!"

"I am sure I only wish to please you and Madame Dupuy," said Marie gently. "When you are kind to me you may lock me up in my room as long as you like; but if I am treated unkindly, Monsieur le Comte, I must go away and hide myself."

"When I seem anything but kind, my little cabbage," said M. Dupuy, "it is for your own good. Madame Dupuy is not so sincere, and does not love you so much as I do."

"Oh, monsieur!"

"Yes, my child! I tell you she is not sincere; to you especially not; although you have been ever devoted to her. My dear little friend, it is time you understood who are your real friends, as the day may not be very distant when you will need them."

"Monsieur, you terrify me! I cannot hear madame

spoken against. I cannot hear that she is not sincere—she, who is so good."

"I tell you she is not sincere! I tell you she is no true friend of yours. I have defended you against her suspicions more than once; you who have always taken her part in our domestic differences. M. le Curé yesterday told her that you were on the direct road to paradise: but she said that you were not exactly what he believed you to be, and that you had a temper to subdue like others."

"I will go and tell mamma that papa is telling Mademoiselle Marie she does not love her, and that papa kissed Mademoiselle Marie's hand!" thought Louise, as she ran off.

And she did so very soon; Madame Dupuy walking down the avenue all the time.

When madame and her daughter came to the arbour, they stopped. Not to listen;—of course not. Madame Dupuy, having sent the child away, stopped to gather a rose; which had a canker in its heart. She heard her husband say:

"You know that I love you, Mademoiselle Marie."

"But so does madame, monsieur."

"Child! Not as I do!"

"Yes, monsieur; more than you do!"

"Ungrateful girl! I tell you madame has never been your friend. It is I always who have defended

you. I want you to hear reason and understand the truth; but you are so stupid—such a cow—there is no doing anything with you!"

"Do not be angry, monsieur; and do not call me names. I am very much obliged to you for your kindness; but I cannot understand why you want me to believe that madame does not love me, and that you do. Why, what am I to do if I do believe it?"

"You are to obey me, child."

"I do so, monsieur, and I obey madame also. Although she has been cross to me lately, sometimes;" said Marie in a dreaming kind of voice.

"And I, Marie?"

"You, monsieur? You locked me up in my room, yesterday; yet you have been very amiable lately, and have not called me a cow or a crow or a stick till now; and I love you."

"More than madame?"

"I do not know that, monsieur. When you are kind I love you very much; but——"

She was going to add: "But I love madame always," when Madame Dupuy gave a faint cry and stood before her.

Ungrateful one! Who destroyed the peace of the household and laid traps for M. le Comte? Who endeavoured to poison his mind against her, Madame Dupuy, in the hope of his ill-usage killing her, that she, Marie,

might be Madame la Comtesse, and rule in the château? These were the mildest of Madame Dupuy's first words. Harder, harsher accusations were hurled like flames of fire on that bewildered head, till Marie seemed to be translated to another life; she knew so little what it all meant. Monsieur Dupuy endeavoured to shield her. But he was swept away like a reed in a torrent before his wife's strength of wrath. He was but a "miserable" and a "coward," and was too mean to be dealt with. It was only Marie who was to blame—after the mother's tenderness lavished on her!

Marie bore up for a short time. She hoped that next day the fit of passion would be exhausted, and that then Madame Dupuy would acknowledge herself in the wrong and reinstate her in her love. But the next day came and Madame Dupuy had not the smallest inclination to own herself in fault. She was as furious against Marie as ever, and threatened to send her to a convent—a threat which she might have carried into execution had she liked; for Marie never seemed to imagine that Madame Dupuy had not her life and death and social disposition, all in her hand.

After many days of this agitation Marie began to feel very ill. She had a fearful headache; she lost her appetite; she could not sleep. Neither could she rest; but wandered about, feverish and distracted, more dead than alive. In about ten days she fell ill of a fever

which an English doctor would have called a brain fever; but the Frenchman said it was an overturning of the blood with typhoid symptoms.

Madame Dupuy had children; and fever, with typhoid symptoms, in a house where there are children, is no light matter. Yet four years ago Marie had nursed madame herself through small-pox, and her children through measles, and had taken all the danger and trouble on herself, suffering no one to help her. For infants and invalids were Marie's specialities. She had therefore, a claim upon Madame Dupuy now, in this her first illness—and an illness brought on by her injustice. For Madame Dupuy knew that Marie was innocent in all that concerned her husband; and that the Count himself had meant nothing but the folly of a vain man who wishes to possess exclusive influence where he feels he has most affection. She was obliged to acknowledge to herself that it was but a pretext, and a cruel one, of which she had made use to disembarrass herself of Marie without the possibility of blame attaching to herself, and with the delightful opportunity of having a little revenge on her husband. Therefore madame made Marie's sickness a great point in reference to her children; talked sweetly of maternal obligations and unvailing regrets; and insisted on Marie being sent away immediately, wherever she might be best taken care of.

Fevered and delirious, Marie was wrapped up in a blanket, put into a carriage and sent off to Paris, to live or die, as it might happen, in a hotel in the Rue Saint Honoré. And there she was, alone, without a relation in the whole world of Paris, and without an intimate friend; for she had been so long with Madame Dupuy, and had so gathered her life into this one focus, that she had lost all connexion with the outlying world beyond the château;—and in the very Quartier in which she had been brought up from infancy was as much alone in all that regarded the obligations of intimate friendship as if she had been in Siberia.

When the people at the hotel understood that the young girl's fever had a typhoid character, they also took the alarm; as was very natural. They gave her notice to leave, instantly. When asked where she was to be taken to, they said, to the Hospice Beaujon: and, indeed, there seemed to be no other place for the poor child, than the hospital among chiffoniers and "brigands."

It fortunately happened, however, that at this critical time the apartment in which Marie had lived with her father and sister, and which the sisters still rented, was vacated by the tenants to whom they had sub-let it. So Marie was carried there, and a nurse and a doctor were sent for. The proprietor of the house took that on himself and paid the hotel bill too: but he put

it down in his quarterly account, "because," he said, "young ladies should never accept presents from men." Marie had however, some money—the balance of salary which Madame Dupuy had paid her.

And this was the little heretic sick unto death, for whom masses and prayers were so diligently said by the kind-hearted Catholics of the Quartier; the Curé saying one on his own account without being paid for it.

The sick nurse, the Sister Sainte Agathe, was nothing like the popular ideal of a sister of charity. She was old and cross and an inveterate gossip. She was expensive and troublesome too in her habits; requiring very high living and extreme punctuality—a thing almost impossible in such a small household and with a patient so dangerously ill. And then she was obliged to leave Marie alone, for two hours every day, for her own religious exercises. Her wages were higher than the wages of unvowed nurses; being six instead of five francs a day. But it was thought more proper, more *convenable*, that a young lady like Marie should have a Sister as a sick nurse. And *les convenances* are the altars of French society, round which gather martyrs as well as worshippers.

M. Adolphe, the doctor with a thick brown beard and moustache, soon took a great interest in Marie—as indeed, who would not?—in all her delirious distress such a dear, good, loving child! And as his interest

in his patiant increased, his disapprobation of her nurse increased with it. He became very cross and fault-finding, so that the Sister Sainte Agathe called him a great idiot—for which she had to say two aves and the litany of La Sainte Vierge at four o'clock in the morning, and to have only bread and vegetables—no eggs—on a Friday. He told her that she did not take enough care of Mademoiselle Marie; and that he was not always sure that his potions were given at the right moment, or his cataplasms taken off when he ordered. It was frightful and desolating, and he wished that his patient had a nurse with a little less religion and a little more good sense. He had a great respect and a high consideration for the sisters of charity; but the ecclesiastical exercises of some among them were sadly in a doctor's way. The sister, a big, coarse, heavy woman, who had become a sister more for a profession than from any religious conviction, promised to herself not to forget what M. Adolphe said; but, with true woman's tact, she appeared to have buried everything in oblivion, while watching eagerly for her hour of retribution.

Marie did not die. M. Adolphe's prescriptions did her no harm if they did her no good; and Sister Agathe hung round her neck three little medals blessed by the Pope—which she said would preserve her. And, when Marie was pronounced out of danger, she told her that the medallions, not the doctor, had saved her.

Marie wondered which it was, but the Curé said it was neither: the masses in St. Philippe had done all. Marie believed each in turn; and ended by accepting a mixture of the whole.

"You are better, mademoiselle?" said M. Adolphe.

Marie looked up and smiled. This was her second day of getting up.

"Yes," she said, "I am almost well."

"Not quite yet. You cannot dispense with my visits for some time to come. Unless you wish it, mademoiselle?" He was rather pale as he spoke.

"I do not want you to leave me, monsieur. When you have left me I shall be very dull and lonely." And Marie turned to him affectionately, like a child.

The sister woke up from a doze. It was after dinner, and she had been asleep. The sister always went to sleep after dinner—especially on meat days.

"Madame, your hour of prayer has come," said M. Adolphe.

The watch on the chimney-piece pointed to the hour. The one in M. Adolphe's pocket was half an hour behind.

"I did not think it was so late!" exclaimed the sister, shuffling about the room. "And you, monsieur?"

"And I remain with mademoiselle."

The Sister Sainte Agathe was disturbed.

"And you remain, monsieur?"

"Yes, madame! It is necessary."

"But not proper, monsieur."

"Suffer me to attend to my patient according to my own ideas, madame."

"Certainly, monsieur; but I shall send in the servant."

M. Adolphe looked annoyed. But French *convenance* put its iron claw on him, and he was obliged to submit.

"Certainly, madame. Send in Josephine."

So the sister went away, and Josephine came in with her work. She was embroidering a cap, and doing it very well.

"Josephine, my child, is the tisane of lime flowers prepared?" asked M. Adolphe. Josephine was a tall, elegant, black-eyed Parisian girl; a terrible thief, but very complaisante.

"No, monsieur, but I will go and prepare it immediately."

Josephine retired from the room with a glance at Marie from her broad bold eyes that told volumes. But M. Adolphe was looking at Marie, and Marie was looking on the ground, and neither saw her.

M. Adolphe was feeling Marie's pulse. The pulse was quick and the bright fever spots on her cheeks were very red. M. Adolphe mixed some extract of orange-flower with sugared water, and gave it to her.

"You are still nervous, mademoiselle."

"Yes, monsieur."

"And your head is hot."

He put his hand on her forehead.

"It does not ache now, monsieur."

"Is my hand cool?"

She placed her hand on his and pressed it against her brow eagerly.

"Yes," she said; "it does me good!"

M. Adolphe became suddenly eloquent and excited. "It does you good," he said, "because I wish to do you good—because I pour out my soul in every breath, in every word, in every look and touch—because I have transfused my life into your sinking heart, and made you mine by this gift of strength and health—because I love you better than my own soul. That is why I do you good."

"You love me, then!" half sobbed Marie; "and it is your love that has cured me!"

And for further expression of gratitude and joy the poor child—weakened and feeble in spite of M. Adolphe's boast—burst into tears, and sobbed as if she had been struck by a misfortune. The stone was cast into the water, and the still lake woke up into a stormy sea where would be peace and quiet no more.

It was very imprudent of M. Adolphe to make this declaration to a girl lying on the outskirts of a bad

fever, when a very small excitement would throw her back into the danger from which she had just escaped. But with all his goodness—and he was really good—M. Adolphe was both impetuous and unreflecting, and had never accustomed himself to command an impulse, whatever it might be. However, he did not work much mischief; for Marie's happiness buoyed her up over the dangerous excitement; and, although she suffered from a temporary increase of fever, she soon got over it, and was all the better afterwards.

Sister Agathe found it out. Marie, as a *gage d'amour* —the most sacred she possessed—gave M. Adolphe one of her little medallions. And the sister missed it.

"Where has it gone, wretched child? What has become of the blessed medallion? O, what a huge, enormous sin you have committed!"

"I gave it to M. Adolphe, madame."

"A demoiselle give presents to a young unmarried man! Fie, then!"

"I gave it out of gratitude, madame."

"My little one, you need show your gratitude only by paying M. Adolphe's bill. You need not give him medals."

"He wished it, madame."

"Oh, he wished it, mademoiselle?"

"Yes, madame."

"Out of gratitude, also, mademoiselle?" The sister's voice was thickly satirical. Marie was silent.

"You love M. Adolphe, then?"

Still silent.

"And he loves you?"

Not a word.

"Mademoiselle, M. Adolphe must be dismissed."

"No, madame."

"I insist, mademoiselle."

"I cannot obey, madame."

"Well! I shall go then to madame, his mother, and demand his instant dismissal from her! I came to nurse a sick person, not to favour a courtship. Reflect, mademoiselle, on my position."

"Oh, madame! my mother!—dear Sainte Agathe!—do not destroy me—do not quite kill me! Oh, Sainte Agathe, do not go to Madame Adolphe! She will take away her son and that would kill me!" And poor little Marie wrung her hands.

But the sister was a rigid person with severe notions of duty—in other people. No prayers were availing. She shook her head mournfully; declared she was in despair; but was none the less resolved. Off she went to Madame Adolphe to detail all she knew of her son's love-lorn proceedings.

Madame Adolphe was shocked—grieved—terrified—agonized. Being a woman of superstitious imagination

she asked earnestly if Marie possessed any philtre, any charm, by which she had worked on M. Adolphe? The sister considered the matter attentively; but told her "No!" for even if she had possessed one, those three blessed medallions would have nullified it. This silenced the suspicion effectually; and Madame Adolphe kissed the sister on both cheeks, in joyful gratitude that she had hung the three medals round Marie's neck. However, Madame Adolphe had but one path to take, and it must be taken resolutely. She had other views for her son. Madame Dufour's daughter had fifty thousand francs; and Madame Dufour had been very amiable to them lately. Madame de Vigny had fifteen thousand francs a year, and a rich bachelor uncle; and Madame de Vigny had asked after M. Adolphe yesterday and had invited him to a party. No; Madame Adolphe had other views for her Jules, and could not possibly entertain the idea of Mademoiselle Marie, Protestant, dowerless, and, as far she knew, without expectations. In France, as it is the mothers who marry their sons, and not the sons who marry themselves, Madame Adolphe's views were paramount; and Mademoiselle Marie must be forgotten.

Jules came home and his mother welcomed him stiffly.

"My mother, what has vexed you?" he said, eating his sorrel soup very hot. It was a fast day, and

they had a "refreshing" soup made of green leaves and milk.

"My heart is full, Jules."

"What has happened, mother?"

"The Sister Sainte Agathe, my son"— The blood came into M. Adolphe's face.

"Well, what of the Sister Sainte Agathe?"

"She has shown me my son's heart."

M. Adolphe attempted a pleasantry.

"I assure you mother, the old Sainte showed you a counterfeit. I possess my own heart; she has not got it."

The pleasantry fell dead.

"We are talking of business, Jules," said the lady severely; and Jules bowed an apology.

"You love your young patient, my son. The sister has told me—worthy woman—that you have even committed the sin of giving or of taking a *gage d'amour* from her. You know, Jules, it is necessary that you should marry with money. Now, what marriage portion has this Mademoiselle Marie?"

"Her beauty and her virtue, my mother."

"Her beauty will not keep the house, my son, nor educate your children; for her virtue—that may pass. The less it is inquired into the better."

"Mother!—how can you, who are so good and kind, say such a cruelty—such a sin?"

"It is true, my son. Did not her friend and patroness, Madame Dupuy, dismiss her because of her incautious—you see I use mild words—conduct towards the Comte her husband?"

"It is a falsehood, mother, indeed!"

"My dear Jules, you have lost your head. Take some medicine and go to bed."

"Mother! You speak as if I were still tied to your apron-strings! I am too old to be treated as a baby, now!"

"At any rate, my dear Jules, I shall treat you so much like a baby as to use my legal power for your good. I forbid you to marry that girl. I will never consent to a ridiculous union which will destroy our position and make my grandchildren beggars."

Madame Adolphe walked out of the room, and forbade her son to follow her.

You may marry in France without the consent of your parents: (you cannot marry in an ordinary way, without that consent, if you are a man forty years of age and upwards:) after three *sommations respectueuses;* that is, supposing you are twenty-five years old. But then, if you have recourse to these "respectful summonses," you break with your family for ever; you make an open rupture and create a public scandal; and no French father or mother will forgive you. M. Jules was in a terrible condition, therefore. He loved

his mother tenderly and he could not make up his mind to a "respectful summons." He knew her too well to dream of her consent to a marriage which had only love and poverty for its foundation, now that she had unfolded her more ambitious projects. No; Madame Adolphe, with her beautiful toilet and pleasant manners, was adamant in her will. Jules was forced to obey or to defy her; and good, soft-hearted, bearded Jules could not make up his mind to do that.

He went and told Marie; and Marie decided for him. They bade each other a sad adieu; Jules going back to his mother a sulky, peevish, irritable man, and Marie locking herself up in her sorrowful little apartment—her two rooms and a kitchen—where she lived a life as still and as retired as that of a veiled nun. Nothing could equal the melancholy of her days in her small apartment, four stories high, where she and Josephine lived. She very seldom went out, and all through the long winter sat, with her saddened thoughts and sorrowed love, wondering why she still lived after having been so near death.

A letter in an unknown hand, and with a broad black seal, came to "Miss Mary Maconnel" one day. It was written on thick English paper, was unpaid, and cost her thirty-two sous. On opening it she read that her father's uncle, Hugh, had died without a will, and that therefore his property had fallen to her and

Emilie, as his next of kin, and that there were no other claimants to interfere. The housekeeper with the cherry ribbons had not been provided for; nor even the parrot.

The news soon spread in the Quartier, and came in turn to Madame Adolphe.

"Here is a lucky circumstance!" cried Madame Adolphe, when the bath-woman in the Rue de Courcelles told her that Mademoiselle Marie had inherited an enormous fortune. "Behold us all content!"

Madame Adolphe was suddenly enraptured. That dear Marie!—so good!—so patient; so self-sacrificing! Madame Adolphe had never had any objection to Marie personally. It was only Marie's poverty. Rich, she became at once the most beautiful and charming young person of the neighbourhood and one whose acquaintance Madame Adolphe must really cultivate.

She caught up her petticoats on her left side in the marvellous manner of French women; tripped away from the bath over the swimming gutters and filthy streets, without picking up a speck of mud; and hurried home—just as Jules entered after a long day's work among whooping-cough.

"Jules, my child, do you know the news?"

"No mother," said Jules sulkily.

He had never been the same son as formerly—had ceased to be the affectionate, gentle, respectful person

that most well-nurtured Frenchmen are to their mothers —honour to them for it!—had grown cold and sullen and wayward and he led his mother but a poor life.

"And you do not know—the little Marie—your ancient friend and patient?"

"Why speak of her, mother?"

"Because I have news that will delight you."

"Delight *me!* Married, perhaps?"

"Perhaps so, my son," said Madame Adolphe settling her cap. It was trimmed with violets and was very becoming.

"Oh, mother, how cruel you are!" said Jules, the tears coming into his honest eyes. "I have obeyed you faithfully and sacrificed my own inclinations to your wishes. You ought to spare me mockery and irony!"

Madame Adolphe's lips quivered and tears came into her eyes too. From sympathy she put her arms round her son's neck and kissed him.

"Forgive me, Jules, for all the pain I have caused you. It was for your own good. But come with me to the little Marie. She is rich, and you can marry her now without wronging your children or destroying yourself. Come! We will both ask her for her love; and she shall find a mother, and a fond one, on the day when she accepts you as her husband. Come, my Jules; let us make the little one happy, and let me take back

my old place in my son's heart through the gentle mediatorship of his wife!"

That night a blessed soul shone, brilliant with joy, like a star through the dark sky of life; a happy heart, freighted with love and hope, floated down the rushing stream of sorrow to ascend it no more. Marie, kneeling in the moonlight, thanked God for the suffering through which she had passed;—since, by that suffering, she said, she knew better what was her present bliss.

After all the different formalities had been complied with—after the consent of mamma had been duly notified and the certificate of birth and baptism had been obtained for the civil marriage—and after the various religious rites had been complied with—Jules and Marie were declared lawfully and indissolubly married. All the faubourg went to Saint Philippe to see the wedding. Marie was pronounced charming and perfectly dressed; and, to mark the public approbation of the whole affair, the *quête*—or collection for the poor made by one of the bridesmaids—was larger than it had been even when the great heiress of the Quartier was married last year.

THE END.

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